

THE IMMORTAL EMPEROR

This is an account of the life and death of Constantine XI Palaiologos, the last Christian Emperor of Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire, who lost his city, his Empire and his life when the Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople in 1453.

Constantine's early career was spent as a governor in the Morea (Peloponnese). He succeeded as Emperor in Constantinople when his elder brother John VIII died without heir in 1448, and his short and tragic reign ended with the siege and conquest of the city by the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II on 29 May 1453. Constantine was last seen fighting at the city walls. The second part of the book records the circumstances of his death and the myth of his eventual resurrection. It was said that the Emperor was not dead but sleeping, the 'Immortal Emperor' turned to marble who would one day be awakened by an angel and drive the Turks out of his city and Empire. The book ends with an account of the claims of reputed descendants of Constantine's family to be heirs of the Byzantine throne, a story which extends into recent times.

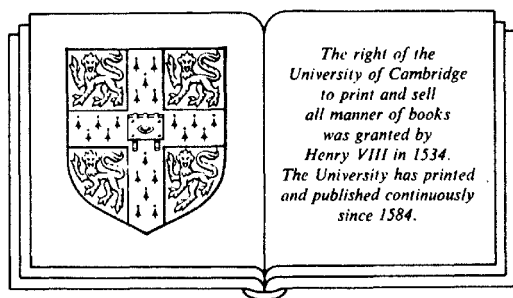
This is the first book to be published on Constantine since 1892. It is illustrated attractively with prints, drawings and artefacts, while the text is based on an array of primary sources, Greek, western and Slav. Professor Nicol is an experienced and authoritative story-teller, and this tale of fact and myth will engross the historian and general reader alike.

THE IMMORTAL
✻
EMPEROR

The life and legend of
Constantine Palaiologos,
last Emperor of the Romans

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Gennadius Library, Athens



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PREFACE

Constantine Palaiologos was the last Emperor of Constantinople, the New Rome. He was killed defending his city against the Ottoman Turks in 1453. The Turkish conquest completed the transformation of the Christian Byzantine Empire into the Muslim Ottoman Empire. Constantine's death marked the end of an institution that traced its origins back to the reign of Constantine the Great in the fourth century, or indeed back to Augustus, the first Roman Emperor. For its ruler and people called themselves Romaioi or Romans, not Hellenes or Greeks. The last Constantine reigned as Emperor for not much more than four years. His dominions were restricted to the city and suburbs of Constantinople and a portion of Greece. He ruled them at the mercy of the Turks. But he was proudly conscious of the fact that so long as he held the Queen of Cities he was the one true Emperor of the Romans.

He was the eighth member of his family to inherit the title since his ancestor Michael Palaiologos had usurped the imperial throne in 1261. He is generally reckoned to have been the eleventh Emperor with the name of Constantine, although Edward Gibbon and others have found reasons for calling him Constantine XII. The facts of his career were recorded by Byzantine chroniclers who knew him and by later Greek historians. The circumstances of his death during the Turkish assault on Constantinople, one of the most dramatic events of the Christian Middle Ages, were described by numerous observers and reporters, Greek, Italian, Turkish and Slav; and the drama of the siege and capture of the city has been eloquently told in more recent years, notably by Sir Steven Runciman. It is not the purpose of this book to retell the tale of the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Its central theme is Constantine Palaiologos, his heroic death and the myths and legends about him that accumulated among the Greek-speaking Christians of later generations. Many of them awaited his resurrection and the

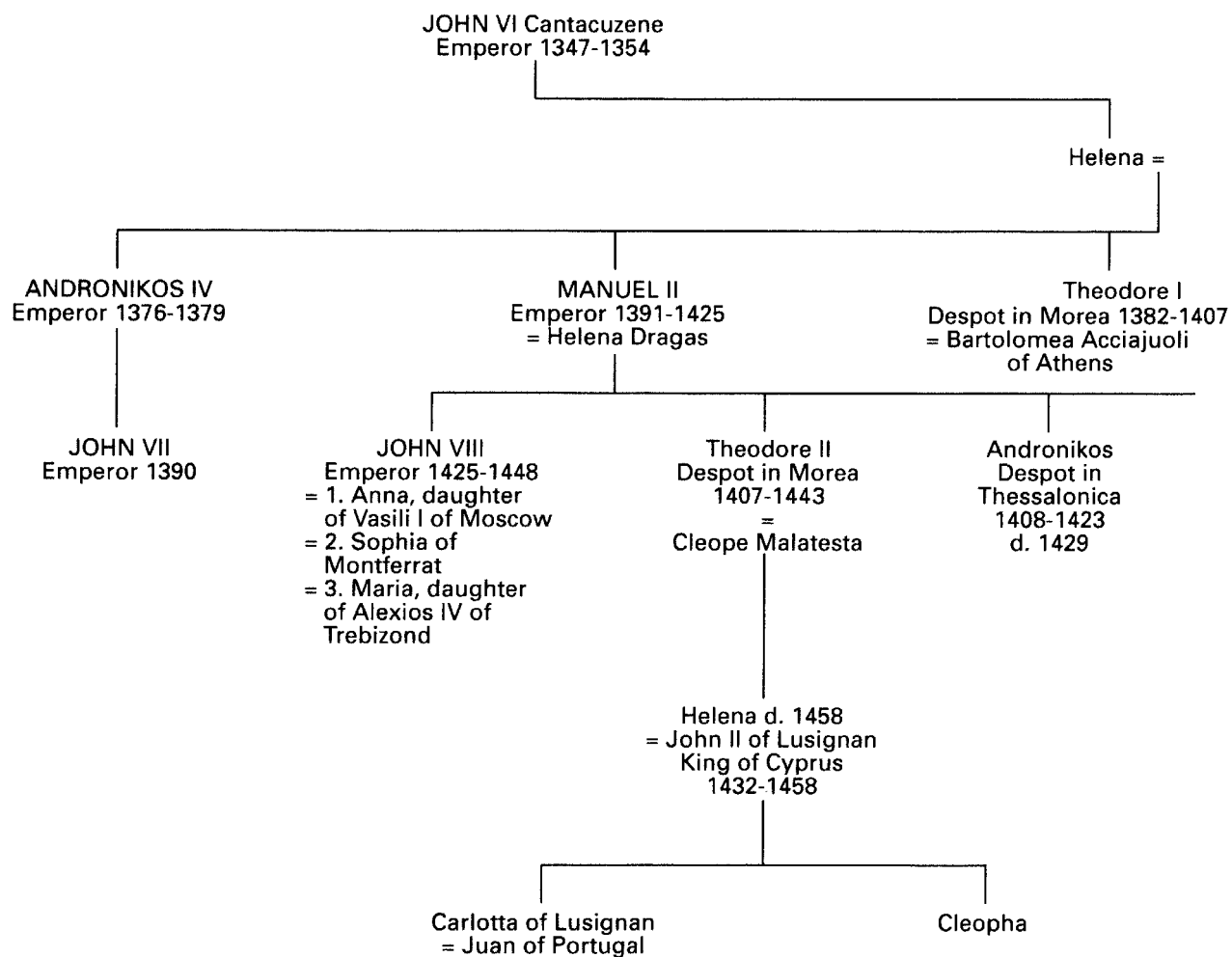
restoration of their lost empire, which they came to equate with the Greek nation, a concept that would have been foreign to most Byzantines or Romaioi of the fifteenth century. The last Constantine became a symbol of the hopes and aspirations of an emerging nation of Hellenes which would one day triumph over the ruins of the Ottoman Empire.

The only monograph in English hitherto devoted to Constantine was published in 1892 by Chedomil Mijatovich, then Serbian ambassador to the Court of St James. It is significant that he entitled it *Constantine, the Last Emperor of the Greeks* and dedicated it to His Royal Highness Prince Constantine, then heir to the Kingdom of Greece. He was not alone in thinking that the Hellenic nation which had been forged out of the Greek War of Independence in the nineteenth century was destined to revive the Byzantine Empire whose light had been extinguished by the Turkish capture of Constantinople and the death of its last Christian ruler.

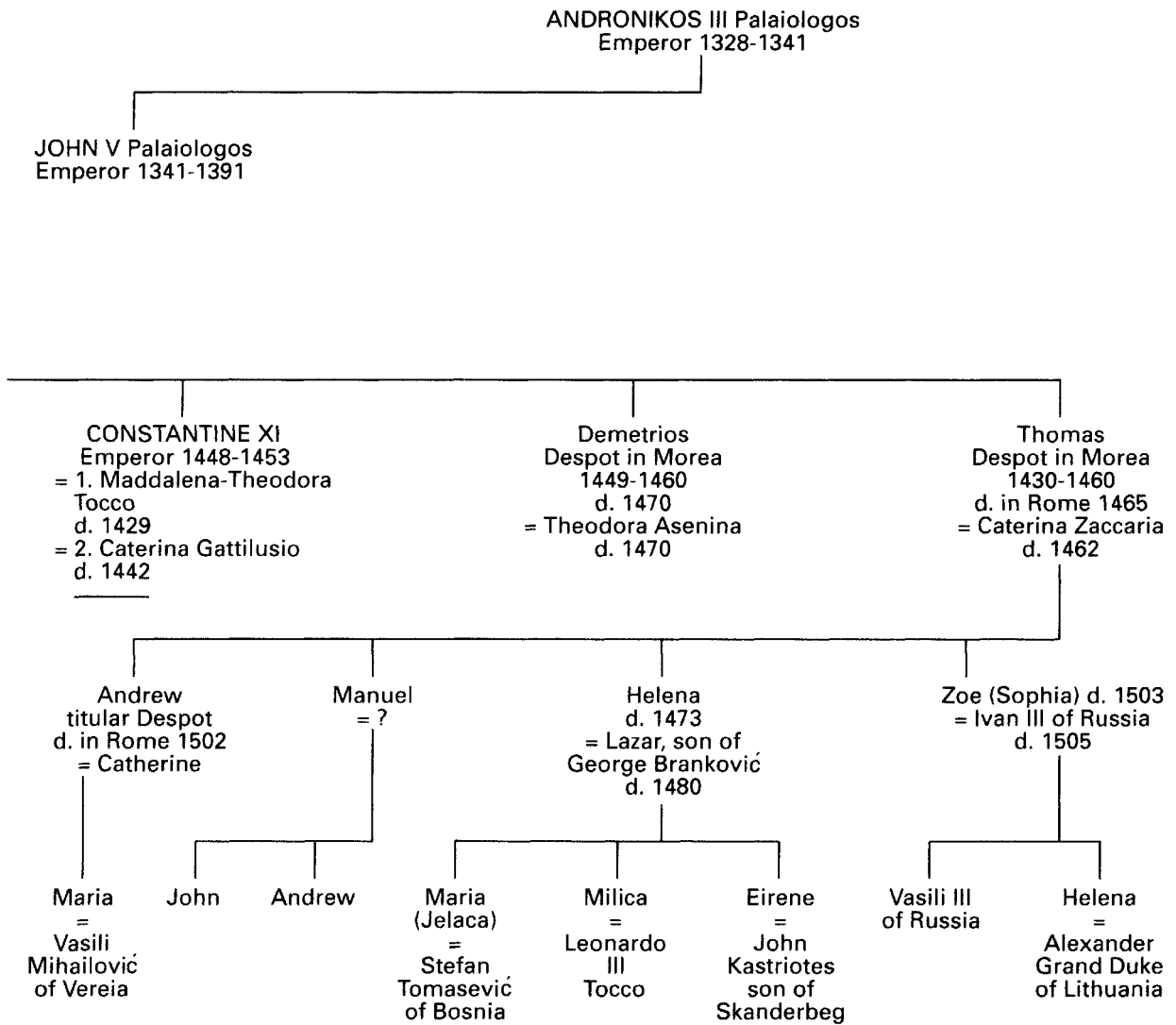
In putting this work together I have relied heavily and gratefully on the unrivalled resources of the Gennadius Library in Athens during my tenure as its Director. More particularly I am indebted to Professor A. D. Paliouras of the University of Ioannina for enabling me to reproduce some of the miniatures from his publication of the manuscript of George Klontzas; to Mr Simon Bendall for freely imparting his expert knowledge of Palaiologan coinage; to Dr Ruth Macrides for her help in tracking down some of the poetic material about the marble emperor; and to Professor A. A. M. Bryer for encouraging my own enthusiasm for the lunatic fringe of Byzantine genealogy.

ABBREVIATIONS

B	<i>Byzantion</i>
BNJ	<i>Byzantinisch-neugriechische Jahrbücher</i>
BS	<i>Byzantinoslavica</i>
BZ	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
CFHB	<i>Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae</i>
DIEE	Δελτίον τῆς Ἱστορικῆς καὶ Ἐθνολογικῆς Ἑταιρείας
DR	<i>Dölger, F., Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches, V: 1341–1453</i> (Munich–Berlin, 1965)
EEBS	Ἐπετηρὶς Ἑταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν
JÖB	<i>Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik</i>
Lambros, PP	Παλαιολόγεια καὶ Πελοποννησιακά (Athens, 1912)
MPG	<i>Migne, J. P., Patrologiae cursus completus. Series graeco–latina</i>
NE	Νέος Ἑλληνομνήμων
PLP	<i>Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit</i> , ed. E. Trapp et al. (Vienna, 1976–)
Schreiner, Chron. brev.	<i>Chronica byzantina breviora: Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken</i> , ed. P. Schreiner (CFHB XII/2: Vienna, 1977)



THE FAMILY OF PALAIOLOGOS *circa* 1350-1500



I * THE DWINDLING EMPIRE

On the night of 2 March 1354 the coast of Thrace to the west of Constantinople was devastated by an earthquake. Some places disappeared into the ground. Some were completely destroyed and depopulated. Others were left defenceless by the collapse of their walls. The survivors fled from their shattered homes looking for refuge in the towns that had been spared. The earthquake was followed by blizzards and torrents of rain. Many of the refugees, especially the women and children, died of exposure. Many more were taken captive by the Ottoman Turkish soldiers who descended on the ruins at break of day. Gallipoli, the largest town in the district, was laid low, though its people managed to get away by sea.¹ The Turks were familiar with the area. For some years they had been employed as mercenaries in the conflicts that raged over the throne or the trade of the Byzantine Empire. They could easily be summoned across the Hellespont from Asia Minor, which they already controlled; and they could usually be relied upon to go home with their pay and their booty at the end of each campaign. The Byzantine Emperor John VI Cantacuzene believed that he enjoyed a special relationship with their leader Orhan, the son of Osman, the founder of the Osmanli or Ottoman people. In 1348 he had given his daughter as wife to Orhan, as though to demonstrate that symbiosis between Turks and Greeks was possible and that the world could be shared between a Muslim Asia and a Christian Europe.

It was perhaps a naive conception, based on a personal friendship. Orhan was a man of his word. His son Suleiman did not subscribe to gentlemen's agreements about the partition of the world. In 1352 some of Suleiman's troops, supposedly in the pay of the Byzantine Emperor, had occupied a fortress near Gallipoli.

¹ John Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus), *Historiae*, ed. L. Schopen, III (Bonn, 1832), pp. 298-9; Nikephoros Gregoras, *Byzantina Historia*, ed. L. Schopen, III (Bonn, 1855), pp. 220-2. Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, II, pp. 283-4.

When the fighting was over they refused to go home, claiming possession of the fortress by right of conquest. It was the first permanent settlement by the Ottoman Turks on European soil. The earthquake two years later gave them the chance to expand and consolidate it. Suleiman crossed the straits from the coast of Asia Minor and occupied the ruins of Gallipoli. He brought with him a great crowd of soldiers and Turkish immigrants to repair and inhabit the deserted towns and villages. A Turkish garrison was installed in Gallipoli and the city was repopulated by Muslims. Gallipoli controlled the sea passage over the Hellespont from Asia to Europe. Legend had it in later years that Suleiman had seen the way across lit up for him by a moonbeam on the water. Once they were in possession of Gallipoli the Ottoman Turks would never go home. The way into Europe was open to them. The year 1354 marks the point of no return for the Christian Roman or Byzantine Empire. By 1405, only fifty years later, Suleiman's successors were masters of Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia, Thessaly and most of central Greece. The Byzantine Empire was reduced to the city and suburbs of Constantinople, parts of the Peloponnese, a few of the Greek islands and whatever else the Turks would allow them; for their emperors were obliged to pay tribute to the Ottoman Sultans and to serve as their vassals.²

It was in 1405, on 8 February, that Constantine Palaiologos was born. He was the fourth of the seven sons of the Emperor Manuel II who had come to this throne in 1391.³ Manuel Palaiologos ruled over a dwindling and disintegrating empire. The great trunk of the tree of Constantinople, where its first seed had been planted, seemed to be hollow and bending in the cold wind blowing from the east. One of its younger branches, however, was still flourishing. In 1349 the Emperor John Cantacuzene, the friend and father-in-law of Orhan, had invested his son Manuel with the imperial title of Despot and sent him to take charge of the Byzantine province of the Peloponnese or the Morea, as it had come to be called. Central and southern Greece had been in foreign hands ever since the Fourth Crusade in 1204. The crusaders on their career of conquest had set up a French Duchy of Athens and

² D. M. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261-1453* (London, 1972), pp. 249-50.

³ J. W. Barker, *Manuel II Palaeologus 1391-1425* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1969), pp. 494-5. *PLP*, IX, no. 21500.

a French Principality of Achaia in the Morea. The nationality of their rulers changed more than once over the years. But to the native Greeks they were all foreigners. The merchants of Venice reaped most of the material profits from occupied Greece through their commercial colonies in the islands and their harbours on the mainland. Little by little, however, the Byzantines were able to win back long lost territory as the Principality of Achaia became enfeebled through lack of recruits and maladministration. Manuel Cantacuzene served as Despot in the Morea for over thirty years. He was a talented soldier, governor and statesman; and under his regime the province prospered and grew at the expense of its foreign neighbours. Its capital was at Mistra, whose romantic and haunting ruins still look down from a spur of Mount Taygetos on to the plain of Sparta. When Manuel died in 1380 it passed from the family of Cantacuzene to the then ruling house of Palaiologos, first to Theodore, son of the Emperor John V, then in 1407 to Theodore II, son of the Emperor Manuel II and elder brother of Constantine Palaiologos. Each bore the grand title of Despot which only a reigning emperor could confer; and their province came to be known as the Despotate of the Morea.⁴

Towards the end of the thirteenth century the Empress Yolande of Montferrat had proposed to her husband Andronikos II that he should adopt the western practice of partitioning his dominions among his sons and stepsons. The Emperor was shocked. He protested that the single monarchy of the Roman Empire could never be split and turned into a polyarchy.⁵ The days of such conscientious adherence to Byzantine tradition were long over by the beginning of the fifteenth century. Succeeding emperors had come to feel that the only way to hold together the scattered fragments of their empire was to keep them in the family by allotting towns and provinces to their sons to govern and defend,

⁴ For the history of the Despotate of the Morea in general, see: D. A. Zakythinos, *Le Despotat grec de Morée*, I: *Histoire politique*; II: *Vie et Institutions*, ed. Chryssa Maltézou (London, 1975); S. Runciman, *Mistra. Byzantine Capital of the Peloponnese* (London, 1980); I. P. Medvedev, *Mistra. Očerki istorii i kultury pozdnevizantiskogo goroda* (Leningrad, 1970). On Manuel Cantacuzene: D. M. Nicol, *The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus) ca. 1100–1460* (Washington, D.C., 1968), no. 25.

⁵ Pseudo-Phrantzes, *Chronicon maius*, ed. V. Grecu, *Georgios Sphrantzes, Memorii 1401–1477: in anexă Pseudo-Phrantzes: Macarie Melissenos Cronica 1258–1481* (Bucharest, 1966), p. 172. (Cited as Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus* and Phrantzes, *Chron. maius*).

granting to each the title of Despot. Manuel II was blessed with a rich progeny of sons. One of them, Michael, died in 1406, so that their number was reduced to six. His eldest son John was designated to succeed him as emperor. His second son Theodore was appointed Despot in the Morea. His third son Andronikos was nominated as Despot at Thessalonica in 1408, when he was barely eight years old. There was not much more territory to be apportioned. When his fourth son Constantine was born therefore, in 1405, Manuel kept him in Constantinople until a suitable appanage became available.⁶

Little is known about Constantine's childhood and early years. He was devoted to his mother Helena, the daughter of a Serbian prince, Constantine Dragaš. He was frequently described as Porphirogenitus, implying that he had been born in the purple chamber of the palace. It was a distinction shared by his elder brother Theodore and his younger brothers Demetrios and Thomas though not, it seems, by the eldest of the family, the future Emperor John VIII. While he was still young Constantine won the almost slavish devotion and admiration of the later historian, George Sphrantzes, whose memoirs are a unique and detailed source for Constantine's career. Sphrantzes, who came from the Morea, served at the court of Manuel II. His uncle was Constantine's tutor. His cousins were Constantine's companions, friends and attendants. When John VIII came to the throne he was at first reluctant to grant Constantine's request that Sphrantzes should enter his service; for he was too valuable as an imperial ambassador, diplomat and counsellor in Constantinople.⁷ Constantine got on well with his elder brother and he had his way in the end. His relations with his younger brothers, Demetrios, born in 1406, and Thomas, born in 1409, were less friendly. One of Constantine's encomiasts in later years makes passing reference to his youthful expertise in hunting, horsemanship and the martial arts; and there is testimony enough for his adventurous spirit, vitality and courage.⁸ He may have inherited something of the commanding presence and character of his father Manuel which so

⁶ Manuel also had a son called Constantine who died in infancy before 1405. Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 4; *PLP*, IX, no. 20491.

⁷ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, pp. 22-4.

⁸ John Dokeianos, *Encomium* of the Emperor Constantine Palaiologos, ed. Lambros, *PP*, I, pp. 221-31, especially p. 227.

impressed those who met him on his travels in western Europe. No contemporary portraits of him survive, except for those on his few coins and seals; and these smudged and stylised effigies do not give him the fine features of his brother John as portrayed by the Italian artists who saw him.⁹

Constantine was born into a world whose ruling class was surprisingly multi-racial. It was a society constantly under threat of extinction. Intermarriage among its leaders was a means of survival. His grandfather, the Emperor John V Palaiologos (1354–91), was the son of an Italian princess, Anne of Savoy. His uncle, the Emperor Andronikos IV, had married into the Bulgarian royal family. His uncle Theodore I, Despot of Mistra, had married a daughter of the Florentine Duke of Athens, Nerio Acciajuoli. His aunt Eirene had married Halil, son of the Turkish emir Orhan. His cousin who reigned briefly as John VII had married a lady of the Genoese family of Gattilusio. His brother John VIII was to marry first Anna, daughter of Vasili of Moscow, then Sophia of Montferrat, and third Maria, daughter of Alexios IV Komnenos, Emperor of Trebizond. His younger brother Theodore II, Despot of Mistra, married Cleope Malatesta, daughter of Carlo Malatesta, Count of Rimini. Constantine himself married twice and both of his wives were Italian. As the child of a Serbian mother and a half-Italian father, it is hard to describe Constantine as a Greek. Like most of his Greek-speaking contemporaries he thought of himself as a Roman, a *Romaïos* or Byzantine.

He was seventeen years of age when, in June 1422, the Ottoman Sultan Murad II laid siege to Constantinople. The Byzantines had enjoyed a long respite from Turkish aggression. The Emperor Manuel II had got on well with the previous Sultan Mehmed I. Mehmed died in 1421 and it at once became clear that the respite was at an end. The Turkish siege was long and bitter. The defence of the city was mainly directed by John VIII, who had recently been crowned as co-Emperor with his father and heir apparent. Thanks to his vigilance the Turks withdrew before the year was out. But the experience proved too much for the elderly Emperor Manuel. In September 1422 he suffered a stroke which paralysed one side of his body. Although he was to linger on for nearly three years, the government of Constantinople was effectively in the

⁹ On the coins and seals of Constantine, see below pp. 70–2.

hands of his eldest son John. The outlook was dismal. The city of Thessalonica was also under siege by the Turks. Manuel's son Andronikos, who had been given charge of it as Despot, was young and in poor health. In the summer of 1423, with his father's consent, he offered Thessalonica to the Venetians; and in September the city changed hands and became the largest and, it was hoped, the most lucrative of all the Venetian colonies in Greece.¹⁰

The Emperor John VIII felt that the time had come to look for help from the western Christian world, as his father had done some twenty years before, without much success. In November 1423 he set out for Venice and Hungary. He nominated his brother Constantine as regent in Constantinople until he came back. Constantine was still young. It was his first taste of authority and he was given the title of Despot to go with it.¹¹ He had his bedridden father, the old Emperor Manuel, at hand to advise him; and, after a few false starts, they arranged a new peace treaty with the Sultan Murad. It was a humiliating arrangement. But it meant that the city of Constantinople was, for a while, spared further onslaughts from the Turks. It was signed on 22 February 1424.¹² By all accounts Constantine discharged his duties as regent with dignity and success. His brother John returned from his travels in Italy and Hungary at the beginning of November 1424. He had gained little. The Catholic King of Hungary had piously advised him that his chances of securing aid from western Christendom would be much enhanced if he and his people would swear obedience to the pope and unite with the church of Rome. The suggestion was far from new. John's father Manuel had heard it before. He had always dismissed it as a move likely to alarm and antagonise the Turks if not as a form of moral blackmail.¹³

Manuel died on 21 July 1425 at the age of seventy-five, having taken the monastic habit for his last few months. John VIII became Emperor in fact as well as in name. His brother, the Despot Constantine, must now be given an appanage to call his own. In their recent treaty the Turks had graciously allowed the Byzantines to retain as a fief a strip of land to the north of Constantinople. It

¹⁰ Barker, *Manuel II*, pp. 361–71; Nicol, *Last Centuries of Byzantium*, pp. 346–51.

¹¹ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, pp. 14–16.

¹² DR, v, nos. 3402–4.

¹³ Barker, *Manuel II*, pp. 376–9.

ran along the Black Sea coast from the town of Mesembria in the north to Derkos in the south. It seems also to have included the port of Selymbria to the west of Constantinople. This was the area allotted to the Despot Constantine in 1425. In so far as it covered the northern approaches to Constantinople it was strategically important. But there was little that Constantine could have done if the Turks chose to break the terms of their treaty and relieve him of his fief.¹⁴

On his way to Venice in 1423 John VIII had broken his journey in the Morea. There he had words with his brother the Despot Theodore at Mistra. Theodore preferred the quiet life of scholarship to the stress of administration and warfare. Two years earlier he had gone through an arranged marriage with Cleope Malatesta from Rimini. It was at first an unhappy union and he expressed a deep desire to become a monk. He took the opportunity of his brother's visit to confide in him. When John returned to Constantinople he assumed that Theodore was still of the same mind. He therefore recalled Constantine from Mesembria and designated him to succeed his brother as Despot in the Morea. Constantine had proved his loyalty and ability in a number of ways. He would make an excellent governor at Mistra. Theodore, however, had by then changed his mind. Some of his admirers, notably his scholarly friend John Eugenikos, had applauded his intention to renounce the vainglory of this world in favour of the delights of the religious life. His more worldly friends, however, had persuaded him that the world had need of him. When the moment came, he declined to step down in favour of Constantine and patched up his differences with his wife. Theodore was to remain as Despot at Mistra for another twenty years. They were years of prosperity, not least in the cultural and intellectual life of the province. Under Theodore's patronage scholars and philosophers gathered at the court at Mistra. Cleope Malatesta came to share and to encourage her husband's scholarly taste; and he was desolated when she died in 1433, for he had come to love her dearly.¹⁵

¹⁴ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 18. Doukas (Ducas), *Istoria Turco-Bizantină (1341-1462)*, ed. V. Grecu (Bucharest, 1958), pp. 237, 245. Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, II, pp. 429-30. DR, V, no. 3414.

¹⁵ John Eugenikos, *Advice to the Despot Theodore*, ed. Lambros, *PP*, I, 67-111.

Constantine was thus thwarted of his chance to become Despot at Mistra. After his father's death, however, John VIII as Emperor devised a plan for using Constantine's talents to better purpose. He could have a separate appanage in the Morea to call his own. It was evident that Theodore, happy though he was in his domain at Mistra, was not the most practical of men and could benefit from some assistance and support. In 1423 the Turks had broken through the defensive wall across the Isthmus of Corinth which Manuel II had built to keep them out. They had invaded and devastated the Morea. Shortly before, the Italian ruler of Epiros and the offshore island of Cephalonia, Carlo Tocco, had occupied Clarentza and the plain of Elis on the north-western side of the peninsula. Theodore arranged a truce with him but it was broken in 1426 and Tocco resumed his campaign. The Emperor John determined to rid the Morea of this nuisance. In 1427 he set out from Constantinople to take personal charge of the matter. He took his brother Constantine with him and also George Sphrantzes. It was then that Sphrantzes formally entered the service of Constantine. They reached Mistra on 26 December and made straight for Clarentza to lay siege to it by land and sea. In a naval skirmish in the nearby Echinades islands Carlo Tocco's ships were sunk and he accepted defeat. He agreed to relinquish his recent conquests; but he hit on a plan to save what was left of his dignity. He offered his young niece, Maddalena, in marriage to the Emperor's brother Constantine, presenting him with Clarentza and Elis as her dowry. It was an amicable arrangement that suited both parties. On 1 May 1428 Clarentza was handed over and on 1 July Constantine was married to Maddalena Tocco in a ceremony near Patras. She took the more familiar Greek name of Theodora; and her uncle Carlo Tocco sailed away to his domains in Epiros.¹⁶

A curious letter in verse was addressed to the Despot Constantine before his wedding. Its anonymous author, claiming to be divinely inspired, congratulated the Emperor on his victory but warned Constantine against marrying the niece of Carlo

¹⁶ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, pp. 20-4; Chalkokondyles, ed. E. Darkò, *Laonici Chalcocandylae Historiarum Demonstrationes*, I (Budapest, 1922), pp. 17-19; Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, II, pp. 435-6. Zakythinos, *Despotat grec de Morée*, I, pp. 196-201, 204-5; D. M. Nicol, *The Despotate of Epiros, 1267-1479* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 190-2.

Tocco. The Tocco family were not to be trusted.¹⁷ It may have been sound advice, though not for the reasons given. For the appointment of Constantine as a second Despot in the Morea, with or without his Italian wife, affected the system of government and was to lead to trouble in the future. Until 1428 the Despotate had been governed by one scion of the imperial family appointed by the Emperor in Constantinople. Now there were to be two, and before long three. The third was to be Constantine's youngest brother Thomas, who had been brought up at Mistra. In theory the Despotate remained one and undivided. But in practice, as was soon to be proved, the central authority, which had worked well in the fourteenth century, broke down and the Byzantine province of the Morea disintegrated into separate and often warring principalities.¹⁸ Theodore had declined to make way for his brother at Mistra. But he was persuaded to surrender a generous part of his allotted territory, including the harbour town of Vostitza (Aigion) on the northern coast of the Morea, several towns and fortresses in Lakonia, as well as Kalamata and Messenia on the western side of the peninsula. His young brother Thomas was given the castle of Kalavryta to the north of Mistra. Constantine at first based himself on Clarentza, to which he was entitled by conquest as well as by marriage. The Emperor should have known his brothers better than to suppose that they would collaborate. For they were a contentious brood.¹⁹

While he was still with them, however, Constantine persuaded him that Clarentza was well placed for attacking and capturing the flourishing commercial and strategic port of Patras not far away. Patras had changed hands several times. In 1428 it was governed by its Latin Archbishop, Pandolfo Malatesta, whom the pope had appointed four years before, although the Turks claimed it as a fief and the Venetians had a proprietary interest in it as a market. It was they who alerted the pope to the danger facing the city in 1428. In July the three brothers John, Constantine and Thomas joined forces in an assault on Patras. It was the young Thomas's first experience of war. They failed to take the city and withdrew once the defenders had agreed to pay Constantine an annual tribute of

¹⁷ Anonymous letter in verse to the Despot Constantine in Achaia, ed. Lambros, *PP*, IV, pp. 88–9.

¹⁸ Zakythinos, *Despotat*, II, p. 81.

¹⁹ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 26. Zakythinos, *Despotat*, I, p. 206.

500 gold coins. According to George Sphrantzes, who was with them, the main cause of their failure was the reluctance of their brother, the Despot Theodore, to help them. He was still dithering about his monastic vocation. He must also have had it in mind, however, that the governor of Patras, the Archbishop Malatesta, was his brother-in-law. It would be injudicious to co-operate in his downfall. The pope was none too pleased with Cleope Malatesta in any case, for he had heard that she had gone over to the Orthodox church, perhaps to win the heart of her husband. Theodore therefore stayed at Mistra.²⁰

It was time for the Emperor John to return to Constantinople. Before leaving, he summoned Constantine to Mistra for a conference. There Constantine and Sphrantzes met in secret and decided to make a second attempt to capture Patras. If they were successful Constantine would stay in the Morea. If they failed he would go back to his appanage on the Black Sea, while retaining possession of Clarentza and the other places in the Morea which had come to him as his wife's dowry. Sphrantzes describes what followed in great detail. He and Constantine marched from Vostitza along the coast, bypassing Patras, to reach Clarentza and Chlounoutsis, where Constantine's wife was staying. They were confident that the Greek inhabitants of Patras would support them. From Clarentza Constantine sent envoys to their leaders to prepare the way for his entry into the city. On 1 March 1429 he led his army towards Patras. The city fathers sent out a messenger who came back to report that Constantine meant to attack and capture the city and its castle. On 20 March, Palm Sunday, the attack was launched. It developed into a long siege punctuated by minor engagements, in one of which Constantine's horse was shot from under him and he was all but killed or captured. His friend Sphrantzes saved his life, though in doing so he himself was wounded and taken prisoner. He was released, more dead than alive, on 23 April. It was not until early in May that the defenders agreed to negotiate. Their Archbishop had gone to Italy to seek reinforcements. They promised that if he were not back by the end of the month they would surrender. Constantine and his troops withdrew, taking over the fortress of Saravalle as they went.

The Archbishop had not returned by the end of May. On 1 June Constantine came back and called upon the leading men of Patras

²⁰ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, pp. 24–6. Zakythinis, *Despotat*, I, pp. 206–7.

to honour their agreement and surrender. Four days later they met in the cathedral of St Andrew, the city's patron saint, and resolved to accept Constantine as their lord. The city of Patras was thus added to his Despotate and there was no question of his leaving the Morea. The castle on the hill above the city, however, was held by the archbishop's men and did not give in for another twelve months. The surrender of Patras distressed the pope, annoyed the Venetians and, worst of all, angered the Turks. The Sultan Murad delivered an ultimatum. Sphrantzes, Constantine's dependable and faithful friend, who had spent forty days in a dungeon at Patras for his master's sake, was sent to pacify the Sultan and, after long talks with him and with Turahan, the Ottoman commander of Thessaly, averted the threat of Turkish reprisals. Constantine sent other ambassadors to mollify the pope and the Venetians. The negotiations took several months.

Sphrantzes, however, had got no further than the Venetian harbour of Naupaktos across the water from Patras when the dispossessed Archbishop Malatesta arrived there from Italy with some Catalan ships and soldiers. He had urged the Sultan to protest against the occupation of his archdiocese by the Greeks. It was too late. The unruly Catalans whom he had brought as a relief force showed little interest in recovering Patras, though they plundered the coast and stormed their way into Clarentza. Constantine was able to buy it back from them for 6,000 Venetian ducats. Later, however, he ordered that Clarentza be destroyed for fear of it falling into the hands of pirates. The archbishop died at Pesaro in Italy in 1441, still protesting that Patras was his and that it was the duty of all Christians in the west to help him win back the apostolic see of St Andrew. In the meantime the castle above Patras surrendered to Constantine in July 1430. The loyal Sphrantzes had his reward. In November he was appointed as the first Byzantine governor of the city now triumphantly restored to the empire after 225 years of foreign occupation.²¹

²¹ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, pp. 40–2; Phrantzes, *Chron. maius*, p. 268; Chalkokondyles, II, pp. 18–19; Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, II, pp. 442–3. E. Gerland, *Neue Quellen zur Geschichte des lateinischen Erzbistums Patras* (Leipzig, 1903), pp. 64–9; Zakythinios, *Despotat*, I, pp. 207–9; II, p. 224; A. Bon, *La Morée franque*, I (Paris, 1969), p. 323; K. M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204–1571)*, II: *The Fifteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1978), pp. 31–5. See below, chapter 6, p. 99. The Spanish traveller Pero Tafur, sailing that way in 1436, reported that 'Florençia' (Clarentza) near Patras was 'a city of fine buildings but now depopulated'. *Andanças é Viajes de Pero Tafur por diversas partes del mundo avidos (1435–1439)* (Madrid, 1874), p. 44. The English

More triumphs followed. Constantine's brother Thomas, whose base was at Kalavryta, brought to an ignoble end the foreign Principality of Achaia which had endured under rulers of various nationalities since the Fourth Crusade in 1204. Its last prince was the Genoese Centurione Zaccaria who died, bereft of almost all his territory, in 1432. His daughter Caterina had married Thomas and brought him what was left of the Principality as her dowry.²² The cause of western colonialism in the Morea had been dying for some years. The initiative of Constantine and his brothers, supported by the Emperor John VIII, relegated it to the history books. By 1430 nearly all of southern Greece had been cleared of foreign potentates and restored to Byzantine rule, except for the Venetian harbours and colonies at Argos, Nauplion, Modon and Coron. Constantine's successes compensated for the dreadful news coming to the Emperor from other quarters. In March 1430 the Sultan Murad put a bloody end to the Venetian regime in Thessalonica. It had lasted only for seven years. Thessalonica became Turkish. In October of the same year the city of Ioannina in the north-west of Greece submitted to the Turks. The Morea was once again Byzantine, but the whole of mainland Greece to the north of the Isthmus of Corinth was now in Turkish control.²³

The Venetians were not enthusiastic about the revival of Greek fortunes in the Morea. They had lost face and a fortune of their own in the rash investment in Thessalonica. They must keep better hold on their properties in the south of Greece. There was mutual distrust between Greeks and Venetians. In an attempt to offset their influence on the economy of his Despotate, Constantine approached the commune of Ragusa (Dubrovnik), whose merchants were frequent visitors to his shores. The government of Ragusa was interested in securing trade concessions and drafted a formal agreement setting out their terms in a letter to Constantine in February 1431.²⁴ No such agreement seems to have been

translator of Tafur renders 'Florençia' as 'Corinth'. *Pero Tafur, Travels and Adventures, 1435-1439*, translated by M. Letts (London, 1926), p. 49.

²² Zakythinos, *Despotat*, I, p. 209.

²³ Nicol, *Last Centuries of Byzantium*, pp. 367; Nicol, *Despotate of Epiros, 1267-1479*, pp. 200-3.

²⁴ The report of the mission of George Palaiologos Cantacuzene to Ragusa, addressed to 'the Despot of the Peloponnese' in February 1431, is in Lambros, *PP, II*, pp. 29-30. B. Krekić, *Dubrovnik (Raguse) et le Levant au Moyen Age* (Paris-La Haye, 1961), pp. 51-2 and no. 787; Nicol, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos*, no. 67.

concluded. But the fact that it was even proposed is another sign of the revived initiative of the Despotate of the Morea under Constantine's management. The Turks too were uneasy about the Byzantine revival in the Morea. In the spring of 1431 Turahan, the Sultan's general in Thessaly, took the precaution of sending troops south to demolish once again the wall across the Isthmus of Corinth. The Greeks must not be allowed to use its shelter to cover their rebellious activities. They must be reminded that they were the Sultan's vassals.²⁵

It remained to be seen whether the often quarrelsome sons of the family of Palaiologos could build on their success and hold the Morea as an island of Christianity against the forces of Islam. Fate was unkind to the Despot Constantine. In November 1429, not long after his victory at Patras, his Italian wife Maddalena-Theodora died at Stameron in Elis. They had been married for less than eighteen months and he was grief-stricken. She was buried at Clarentza, though her remains were later moved to the church of the Life-Giving Christ (Zoodotos) at Mistra. Two of the scholarly literati of Mistra, John Eugenikos and Bessarion, Bishop of Nicaea, mourned the melancholy event in stylised epitaphs.²⁶ Some months later, perhaps because he wished to be nearer to Mistra, Constantine came to a new arrangement with his younger brother Thomas. The capital of Thomas's appanage was Kalavryta. In March 1432 he agreed with Constantine that they should exchange their territories. Constantine transferred his court to Kalavryta. Thomas moved to Elis. It was an amicable exchange and presumably had the approval of their brother, the Emperor John, and also of the senior of the three Despots in the Morea, Theodore, who still held sway at Mistra.²⁷

The harmony between them all did not last long. It was bedevilled by the question of seniority among them. The Emperor John had married three times, but his marriages had produced no

²⁵ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 50; Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, II, p. 444.

²⁶ John Eugenikos, ed. Lambros, *PP*, I, pp. 117–22; Bessarion, ed. Lambros, *PP*, IV, pp. 94–5. On the monastery of Christ Zoodotos at Mistra, see Zakythinis, *Despotat*, II, pp. 197, 298. On the site of her death (Stamiron, Stamira, not St Omer), see Bon, *La Morée franque*, I, pp. 293, 343 n. 1.

²⁷ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 50, reports that Thomas moved to Clarentza. But since Clarentza had already been demolished, it seems more probable that Thomas established himself at Patras, where he was to be found in 1435. Gerland, *Neue Quellen*, pp. 67–8, 218.

heir to the throne whom he could designate as co-Emperor. It was assumed that one of his brothers would succeed him when the time came. His own preference was for Constantine, a fact known and resented by the Despot Theodore. Constantine could get on with his younger brother Thomas. But his personal relations with Theodore were soured by envy and jealousy. In August 1435 the Emperor summoned him to Constantinople. George Sphrantzes went with him. Theodore may well have suspected that the matter of the succession to the throne was being arranged. In March 1436 he too arrived in Constantinople. The Emperor was unable to bring his brothers to a discussion, still less to an agreement. They returned separately to the Morea. They were in a mood to fight it out. About the end of the year 1436 two mediators came from the capital to calm them down and prevent a civil war. A third mission led by the future Patriarch Gregory Mammēs brought them to their senses. It was agreed that Constantine should move to Constantinople, while his brothers Theodore and Thomas stayed as Despots in the Morea. The Emperor needed him once again to act as regent, for he was shortly leaving for Italy. Constantine reached Constantinople on 24 September 1437. Nothing had been said about his nomination as co-Emperor. But his appointment as regent for a second time clearly indicated that he was regarded as heir-apparent to the throne.²⁸

John VIII sailed for Italy at the end of November. The purpose of his journey was to attend the council which the Pope, Eugenius IV, was convening at Ferrara to accomplish the union of the Greek and Latin churches. It had always been the view of the papacy that the Christians of the west could not go to the rescue of Byzantium from the Turks until the Byzantine church had renounced its errors and acknowledged obedience to Rome. Only then could a crusade be preached and mounted for the relief of Constantinople and the discomfiture of the Turks. After long negotiations Pope Eugenius had persuaded John VIII and the hierarchy of his church to discuss the matter at a council at Ferrara. To make sure that they would come he sent ships to fetch them. The ships brought a company of archers from Crete for the defence of Constantinople; and it was

²⁸ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, pp. 52–4; Syropoulos, *Les 'Memoires' du Grand Ecclésiarque de l'Eglise de Constantinople Sylvestre Syropoulos sur le Concile de Florence (1438–1439)*, ed. V. Laurent (Rome, 1971), pp. 172, 608; Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, II, pp. 448–9.

on one of these that Constantine sailed from the Morea, embarking at Karystos in Euboea on 1 September. Among his fellow passengers was a Venetian cleric, Marco Condulmer, whom he had last encountered at the surrender of Patras in 1429.²⁹ The Emperor led an impressive delegation to Italy. With him were the Patriarch of Constantinople, Joseph II, representatives of the Patriarchs of Alexandria and Jerusalem, bishops, monks and secular clergy, among them the learned Bessarion of Nicaea, Mark Eugenikos of Ephesos, and the monk Isidore, Bishop of Kiev. Among the laymen, the most distinguished was the philosopher George Gemistos Plethon from Mistra, who had known the Emperor and his brothers for some years. Also in the Emperor's company was his younger brother Demetrios to whom he had given the title of Despot in 1429. Demetrios had already shown rebellious tendencies and he was known to be against any plan for the union of the churches. But he could not safely be left behind in Constantinople. There was a suspicion that he had been trying to interest the Turks in supporting his own bid for succession to the throne.³⁰

Constantine was the least troublesome and the most trustworthy of the Emperor's brothers. He had proved his competence as regent in Constantinople during John VIII's absence in the west in 1423–24; and he had the full support of his mother, the Dowager Empress Helena Dragaš. She was elderly but still active in affairs of state; and Constantine was her favourite son. As ministers and counsellors he had Loukas Notaras, later Grand Duke, a man of great experience, and Demetrios Palaiologos Cantacuzene, his cousin; while at his side there was the faithful George Sphrantzes, at whose wedding in 1438 he acted as best man.³¹ The fact that the Turks held to their truce and made no move against Constantinople while the Emperor was away may be a tribute to Constantine's careful handling of a dangerous situation. There was a moment, however, in 1439, when he felt impelled to write to his brother in Italy, urging him to remind the pope that he had promised to send at least two warships for the defence of Constantinople by the end of spring. He hoped that the ships

²⁹ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 56; Syropoulos, ed. Laurent, pp. 172–3.

³⁰ J. Gill, *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge, 1959).

³¹ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 62. On Demetrios Palaiologos Cantacuzene, see Nicol, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos*, no. 75.

would be on their way within fifteen days of his message, for there were ominous signs that the Sultan was preparing a great offensive. Nothing came of his request; and it was in any case a false alarm. For the Sultan's offensive was directed not against Constantinople but against the Serbian fortress of Smederevo on the Danube.³²

The council which John VIII had gone to attend was a protracted and often quarrelsome gathering. It concluded its business at Florence in June 1439, with a declaration to the effect that the union of the Greek and Latin churches had been achieved. The Decree of Union was signed by all but one of the Byzantine hierarchy.³³ Not until 1 February of the following year did the Emperor get back to Constantinople. He was escorted to his palace with a great show of pomp and ceremony by his brothers Constantine and Demetrios, who had left Italy before him.³⁴ By then the news that the Greek delegation to the council had been browbeaten into signing the document of union with the pope had stirred a wave of bitterness and resentment among the Byzantines. They gave their Emperor a cool reception. Many felt that he had betrayed them. His sadness was deepened by the tragic news that his beloved wife, whom he had not seen for more than two years, had died while he was on his way home.

Constantine's own feeling about the union of the churches was in line with that of his brother. He was not fanatically for or against it. If the sacrifice of the *amour propre* of the Orthodox Christians resulted in a crusade from the west for the salvation of Constantinople then it would not have been in vain. The Orthodox church had always believed in the principle of 'economy' or compromise. Many, however, protested that the Union of Florence had overstepped the limits of that principle. It became a point of vigorous and sometimes violent dissension in the last years of Byzantine society. There were those who said, as Constantine's father had said when the prospect of union was raised, that it was a diplomatic blunder. The union of eastern and western Christians would surely arouse the suspicions of the Turks.³⁵ There were

³² Constantine's letter, reinforced by similar messages from the Dowager Empress and his two ministers, was delivered by Phakrases Cantacuzene. Nicol, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos*, no. 74. Syropoulos, ed. Laurent, pp. 396-8. F. Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and his Time* (Princeton, N.J., 1978), pp. 16-18.

³³ The Latin text of the Decree is printed in Gill, *Council of Florence*, pp. 414-15.

³⁴ Syropoulos, ed. Laurent, pp. 544-5.

³⁵ Phrantzes, *Chron. maius*, p. 320.

many more, like Mark Eugenikos, the Bishop of Ephesos who had refused to sign the Decree of Union at Florence, who saw it as the ultimate betrayal of their inherited Orthodoxy. It would bring down upon them the wrath of God. Constantine's friend George Sphrantzes was to record in retrospect that the most potent causes of the Turkish conquest of Constantinople were the Council of Florence and the union of the churches. It was an opinion that he would not have expressed at the time because of his loyalty to the Emperor and his master Constantine. He put the dilemma in the form of a parable. 'For many years', he said, 'I and others have been wont to meet in the church of the Holy Wisdom by walking down the Middle Road of the city. Then, after a while, others found a different road leading, so they say, to the same church; and they begged me to take that road with them, saying that the road that I took was good and old and familiar to them for a long time, but that the road they had found was also good. Now I hear from some that the new road is good and from others that it is bad. Why then can I not say: "Go in peace and in love to the Holy Wisdom by whichever road you please. I shall take the road that I have followed with you for a long time, a road which your ancestors and mine travelled and which they acknowledged to be good"'.³⁶ Such a tolerant attitude was unusual. Tolerance was rare in the emotive atmosphere of Constantinople in the fifteenth century and rare too in Florence and in Rome. Perhaps the Despot Constantine Palaiologos had a measure of it. But he felt himself committed to the policy of his brother the Emperor John.

Constantine's responsibilities as regent ended in February 1440 when the Emperor came back from Italy. He stayed in Constantinople for the rest of that year. One reason for his delay in returning to the Morea was that he had it in mind to marry again. Ten years had passed since the death of his first wife Maddalena Tocco. The lady finally selected was Caterina Gattilusio, daughter of the Genoese lord of Lesbos. The Gattilusio family were slightly more respectable than the Tocchi of Epiros. They had contracted marriages with the Palaiologi before. They were also wealthy. In December 1440 George Sphrantzes was sent to Lesbos to propose and arrange the betrothal and marriage. Towards the end of the following year Constantine sailed from Constantinople in com-

³⁶ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, pp. 56-8.

pany with Sphrantzes and the Grand Duke Loukas Notaras. They made first for Lesbos and there at Mitylene in August Constantine married Caterina Gattilusio. In September he continued his journey to the Morea, leaving his new wife in the care of her father on Lesbos.³⁷

He had been away from the Morea for more than three years. He found that his brothers Theodore and Thomas had managed quite well without him. He felt that his own interests might be better served if he were nearer to Constantinople. His other brother Demetrios, on his return from Italy, had been allotted the appanage on the Black Sea coast where the Emperor could keep an eye on him, for he was known to be bitterly opposed to the union of the churches, probably more from political motives than religious conviction. Constantine had the idea that Demetrios might care to change places with him. He sent Sphrantzes to put this suggestion to the Emperor, to Demetrios and to the Sultan Murad. The Sultan, as suzerain of them all, had to be consulted about such matters. It was not the right moment to tempt Demetrios to new pastures. He had already made a deal of his own with the Sultan and had declared war on the Emperor, posing as the champion of the growing anti-unionist faction, a role that suited his personal ambition for the throne and the political purposes of the Turks. When Sphrantzes reached him Demetrios was preparing to march on Constantinople with troops kindly supplied by his friend the Sultan. He was in no mood to listen to the proposal brought to him from his brother Constantine, and Sphrantzes left him empty-handed. The danger was so imminent that the Emperor summoned Constantine to hurry back from the Morea to help defend the city.

The Turkish attack began in April 1442. In July Constantine left the Morea yet again. On his way he stopped at Lesbos to pick up his wife Caterina. But the Turks had got to hear of his coming and when he reached the island of Lemnos he and his wife were trapped there by a Turkish fleet. For some months he could get no further, though the Venetians sent eight galleys from Constantinople to help him in what they described as his praiseworthy

³⁷ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, pp. 62-4; Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, II, p. 460. W. Miller, 'The Gattilusj of Lesbos', in Miller, *Essays on the Latin Orient* (Cambridge, 1921), pp. 329-30.

resistance. In the midst of this disaster Caterina fell ill. Her illness was aggravated by the circumstances; and in August she died. She was buried at Palaiokastro on Lemnos. The Turks soon sailed away. But it was November before Constantine, a widower for the second time, reached Constantinople. By then Demetrios's coup had failed. The Emperor was more than ready to make over to Constantine the fortress of Selymbria on the Sea of Marmora, from where he could spy on the movements of his brother Demetrios. In March 1443 George Sphrantzes was made governor of Selymbria in his master's name. The game of musical chairs between Constantine and his brothers was not yet over, however. In June of the same year a messenger from Theodore at Mistra arrived in Constantinople with yet another proposal for the Emperor to consider. Theodore now suggested that he should make over the Despotate of Mistra to Constantine in exchange for Selymbria. All were in accord with this arrangement, although it is doubtful whether Demetrios was consulted. It would put Theodore potentially nearer to the throne. But it would make Constantine, the evident heir-apparent, Despot of the capital city of the Morea. In October 1443 Constantine left for his new post at Mistra. Theodore took the same ship on its return voyage to Constantinople.³⁸

Constantine's professed adherence to the union of Florence naturally brought him the favour of the pope; and no doubt the Emperor John had briefed him on the state of affairs in the Morea, the last Byzantine province in Christian hands. It was a province where there were many Roman Catholic residents, especially the Venetians, whose fortified harbours at Modon and Coron in Messenia still did a thriving business. The Florentine family of Acciajuoli also retained control, albeit tenuously, of Athens. The pope had deplored Constantine's eviction of the Latin Archbishop of Patras. The Venetians regarded the various Despots of the Morea as a menace to the security of their property and their trade in southern Greece. But Pope Eugenius IV nourished a pious hope that, now that Greeks and Italians were united in the Roman faith, they would live happily together under the banner of St Peter. In

³⁸ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, pp. 64–6; Chalkokondyles, II, p. 80; Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, II, pp. 461, 463–4; F. Thiriet, *Régestes des Délibérations du Sénat de Venise concernant la Romanie*, III (Paris–La Haye, 1961), nos. 2590, 2597.

April 1441 he had written to the Despot Constantine in these terms, commending him for his promise to make the union of Florence a reality, both in the present and in the future when, as seemed likely, he would succeed his brother as Emperor.³⁹

³⁹ G. Hofmann, ed., *Epistolae Pontificiae ad Concilium Florentinum spectantes*, III (*Concilium Florentinum: Documenta et Scriptores*, Series A, I: Rome, 1946), no. 249, pp. 35–6.

2 * CONSTANTINE: DESPOT AT MISTRA

When Constantine succeeded his brother Theodore as Despot at Mistra in October 1443, the government, administration and defence of the Morea were effectively committed to himself and his younger brother Thomas. Thomas ruled over the former Principality of Achaia which had come to him by marriage. Constantine resided in the Palace of the Despots at Mistra, which had always been recognised as the capital city and centre of the Byzantine Peloponnese: and his dominions covered the larger part of the peninsula. He had never found Thomas to be troublesome. With his other brothers Theodore and Demetrios out of the way, Constantine saw the possibility of reuniting the Despotate and making it a secure and nearly self-sufficient principality. He had plans for so doing; and he had well-meaning advisers eager to offer him schemes, workable or Utopian, for reinvigorating the agriculture, the economy and the defence of the Morea.

Mistra had become a cultural capital of the Byzantine world. Its earlier Despots, notably Theodore II and his talented wife Cleope Malatesta, had patronised scholarship and the arts. Men of taste and learning had settled there. Mistra in the fifteenth century provided a more exciting and creative atmosphere than the gathering gloom and despair of Constantinople. Churches, monasteries and mansions were still being built, remodelled and decorated with wall-paintings. Libraries were being collected and manuscripts were being copied for posterity. Among the intellectual luminaries of Mistra in Constantine's day were Bessarion of Trebizond, titular Bishop of Nicaea, and his erudite teacher George Gemistos Plethon. Bessarion had been so persuasive and eloquent an advocate of the union of the churches at the Council of Florence that the pope had made him a cardinal. He left Mistra for Rome soon after his return from the council.¹ But he was

¹ On Bessarion in general: L. Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Humanist und Staatsmann*, 3 vols. (Paderborn, 1923-27, 1942). *PLP*, II, no. 2707.

constantly concerned about its welfare and its future. Plethon had also been in Florence. He had been much admired in Italy as a scholar, though he found the council to be boring and irrelevant. He left it early to go back to Mistra, where he had lived, studied and taught for about thirty years.

Plethon had earlier presented a series of addresses to the Emperor Manuel II and the Despot Theodore II outlining his own plans for the regeneration of the Morea as a new centre for what he called Hellenism. He also knew and corresponded with the Emperor John VIII and with Constantine.² His proposed reforms were based on the premise that the Morea or the Peloponnese was, as its ancient name implied, an island, protected from invasion by the sea and defensible by land through the construction of the wall across the Isthmus of Corinth which he regarded as one of the greatest achievements of Manuel II. Its insularity and security made it an ideal testing-ground for the theory, held by all civilised men, that the most stable and effective form of government is monarchy. This was a commonplace of Byzantine political theorists. But Plethon seemed to suggest that the Despots of the Morea should exercise an authority over their little kingdom as great as that of an emperor in Constantinople. Constantinople might once have been the New Rome. Mistra should become the New Sparta. Within the Island of Pelops a strongly centralised monarchy would have the power to institute a thorough reform of the administration, the economy, the social structure, the agriculture and above all the defence of the Morea. It would become a Kingdom of the Hellenes, thus being true to its past. For Plethon claimed that it was the only part of the Greek world which had always been inhabited by men of Hellenic stock with no admixture of foreign blood. This was the special pleading of one who ignored the countless invasions of Slavs, Bulgars and other non-Hellenic races in the past, let alone the Albanians whom the Despot Theodore I had encouraged to come and settle in the Morea in Plethon's own time. He also disregarded the fact that Constantine Palaiologos and his brothers were the sons of a Serbian mother, Helena Dragaš, and that Constantine at least was proud to bear her name.

² On Plethon: C. M. Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon. The Last of the Hellenes* (Oxford, 1986), especially pp. 87–8.

Plethon's Utopian schemes had the merit of being comprehensive, covering every aspect of public and private life. Society was to be divided into two classes, the soldiers and the taxpayers, the former defending the island of the Morea and native to its soil, the latter supporting them by their taxes, payable not in cash but in kind. The monarch, or Despot of them all, would be advised by a council not of the aristocracy but of men of moderate means who would set standards of conduct for all to imitate. All land was to be common property. The cultivation of waste or virgin land was to be encouraged. But one-third of all produce was to be paid into the common funds. Such a reform would, as Plethon well knew, be fiercely contested by the great landlords of the Despotate who had defied much less draconian attempts to bring them to heel for many years. He also put forward proposals for reforming the currency and for protecting and stimulating home produce by restricting imports. His priority, however, was the creation and maintenance of a standing army composed not of mercenaries or foreigners but of native Greeks loyal to their country and its sovereign ruler. If his schemes had been realised they would no doubt have produced an unpleasant military dictatorship in which everything was subordinated to the interests of the state and the state was personified in what it was hoped would be a platonic philosopher king. The Emperor Manuel and his son Theodore had patiently and courteously taken note of Plethon's advice and rewarded him with honours and privileges. But there is no proof that they ever acted on it.³

The Despot Constantine, however, did not need to be told that the defence of the Morea must be strengthened at its weakest point. As soon as he was established at Mistra he set to work on reconstituting the wall across the Isthmus of Corinth. The Turks had easily breached it in 1423 and demolished it in 1431. Constantine and his brother Thomas, with the often reluctant collaboration of the leading men of the district, had it completely restored. It was called the Hexamilion or six-mile wall. The work was finished in March 1444.⁴ It was not the first of its kind. The

³ Plethon's proposed reforms are described by Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, pp. 92-109; Nicol, *Last Centuries of Byzantium*, pp. 361-2.

⁴ On the Hexamilion wall, see Sp. P. Lambros, *Τὰ τεῖχη τοῦ Ἰσθμοῦ*, *NE*, 2 (1905), 435-89; 4 (1907), 20-6, 240-3; 5 (1908), 115-16; Zakythinis, *Despotat*, I, pp. 236-7; II, pp. 141-2; J. W. Barker, *Manuel II*, pp. 311-16; K. M. Setton, *The Papacy and the*

Isthmus had been fortified in ancient times, before the invasion of Xerxes in 480 BC. Justinian had built a much more substantial wall in the sixth century. Manuel II had used the ruins of Justinian's building in 1415. The wall ran from the Gulf of Corinth to the Saronic Gulf, a distance of between 7,028 and 7,760 metres. It was strongly fortified along its length with 153 towers. Another account speaks of 130 small towers and nine large ones, in addition to forts at either end and a castle on the site of Justinian's fortress at Isthmia. Manuel is said to have completed his Hexamilion in twenty-five days in April and May 1415. Many were impressed by the achievement at the time, not least the Venetians who, however, politely declined to contribute to its cost: and the cost in manpower and in money was so great that many of the local Greeks and landlords chose to decamp to Venetian territory rather than be pressganged as labourers or impoverished as taxpayers. Others took to open rebellion and had to be forced into submission.

A curious series of prophecies came to be associated with the Hexamilion. They were said to have been pronounced by the Pythia at Delphi at the time of the invasion of Greece by Xerxes. The Italian traveller Ciriaco of Ancona seems to have been the first to record them. They foretold that there would be four such walls across the Isthmus of Corinth. Three would succumb to foreign attacks. Only the fourth would stand firm against its enemies. The third of the prophecies was taken, after the event, to refer to Manuel's reconstruction of Justinian's wall, which had twice failed to hold back the Turks. The last prophecy intimated that the fourth rebuilding of the wall would prove to be the ultimate deterrent of the foreign enemies of the Greeks. They would be driven back from it and worsted 'when the pine-tree falls to the ground and blood is shed upon the pine'. The builder of the fourth wall would therefore be the fortunate one. No names were mentioned but it is clear that the Despot Constantine was intended. The prophecy was a cryptic yet touchingly optimistic declaration of faith in the future and, like so many oracular utterances, turned out to be sadly mistaken.⁵

Levant, II, pp. 4-5. The date of its completion is recorded by the Short Chronicles, ed. Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, II, p. 465.

⁵ D. A. Zakythinos, Μανουήλ Β' ὁ Παλαιολόγος καὶ ὁ Καρδινάλιος Ἰσίδωρος ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ, *Mélanges offerts à Octave et Melpo Merlier*, III (Athens, 1957), pp.

Not long after the wall was finished in 1444, Cardinal Bessarion, writing from the comfort of Rome, addressed a long letter to Constantine. He congratulated him especially on rebuilding the Hexamilion. But that, he said, was only a beginning.⁶ Bessarion, like his former master Plethon and in a very similar vein, went on to propose a list of reforms to improve the defence, the economy, the stability and the intellectual life of the Morea. He suggested that the capital of the Despotate should be moved from Mistra to a site near the point of greatest danger. A new city should be founded at the Isthmus to provide a base for the standing army needed to guard the wall, for it could never properly be manned and garrisoned by piecemeal recruitment of troops in emergencies. He stressed the importance of training and military discipline for the soldiers who would constitute the reformed army. Bessarion's vision was wider and more international than that of Plethon. He saw the Despotate of the Morea under Constantine playing its part by land and sea in the combined effort of eastern and western Christians against the infidel which, with God's help, was to result from the union of the churches. He was thinking of the crusade then being planned by Pope Eugenius IV in the wave of western optimism that followed the Council of Florence.⁷

The pope had outlined his proposals in October 1439. The moment seemed propitious. Constantine was in touch with Rome and knew what was afoot. He knew too that, though the Turks had invaded and conquered most of Serbia, the Serbian Despot George Branković, to whom he was related, had taken refuge in Hungary; and it was from Hungary that the counter-offensive against the Turks was to be launched. It was to be led by King Ladislas, the Polish King of Hungary, and his brilliant commander-in-chief John Hunyadi. As a crusade against the impious infidel it was to be organised by the pope's legate Cardinal Giuliano Cesarini. The pope, the Venetians and the Duke of Burgundy were to provide a fleet which would meet the army when it reached the Black Sea. By June 1443 all was ready. The crusade set out from Hungary in July. Constantine was aware of these preparations and

45–69, especially pp. 60–3; E. W. Bodnar, 'The Isthmian Fortifications in Oracular Prophecy', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 64 (1960), 165–71.

⁶ Bessarion's letter to Constantine: ed. Lambros, *PP*, IV, pp. 32–45. See Zakythinos, *Despotat*, I, pp. 226–8; II, p. 143.

⁷ Nicol, *Last Centuries of Byzantium*, pp. 378–9; Runciman, *Mistra*, p. 82.

he was eager to take the chance that they offered for offensive action against the common enemy. He could contemplate the theoretical proposals of Cardinal Bessarion at a later date.

Bessarion offered him a long-term view of the future of the Morea. Secure behind its well-defended wall it could become a safe haven for immigrants from elsewhere and for refugees, who would add to its available manpower for the army, for agriculture and for industry. He emphasised the necessity for creating and maintaining a professional army. Like Plethon, he advocated that its population should be divided into two classes, the soldiery and the workers. Most of Bessarion's ideas were indeed derived from Plethon. Both men rightly observed that the mineral resources of the Morea had barely been tapped; that the produce of its fields could be multiplied by more systematic farming; that the export of goods vital to the native population should be controlled; and that the import of unnecessary luxuries should cease. It was in many ways a backward province. In the circumstances of a reunited Christendom its people could learn much from the western world. Bessarion proposed that young men from Greece be sent to study in Italy to acquire the culture which would make them the nucleus of an educated élite, refined by the humanities but also proficient in the sciences of engineering, mining, metallurgy, arms manufacture and shipbuilding. The acquired skills of such students would fit them to exploit the natural resources of the Morea, the timber from the almost virgin forests, the metal from the mines, to the point where the country might become almost self-sufficient. He offered his own services in Italy as an educational agency. He saw no shame in Greeks learning from the west. They would only be retrieving some of their patrimony. For the Latins had acquired their wisdom and their technical skill from the Greeks in the first place.

Bessarion did not envisage such an authoritarian and illiberal regime as Plethon. Both men, however, had lived long in the Morea. They knew that a peculiar difficulty confronting any would-be reformer was the character of its people. Constantine's father, the Emperor Manuel II, had deplored the evidently incurable passion of their landlords and local archons for bearing arms and fighting among themselves.⁸ Bessarion thought that they

⁸ *Letters of Manuel II Palaeologus*, ed. G. T. Dennis (CFHB, VIII: Washington, D.C., 1977), no. 51, pp. 144-7; Nicol, *Last Centuries of Byzantium*, p. 357.

were sunk in luxury and lethargy. But it would have taken a very tyrannical monarch of ancient Spartan mould to unite the warring factions of feudal landlords who had had a free hand for so long. For all Bessarion's recommendations, Mistra remained the administrative and cultural capital of the Despotate. But it was never the focal point of a unified or centralised government. Constantine ensured a measure of loyalty to himself by appointing men whom he could trust as governors of the larger towns. George Sphrantzes, who had earlier been the first Greek governor of Patras, became responsible for Mistra and its neighbourhood. Patras was governed by Alexios Laskaris; Corinth by John Cantacuzene; Vitylo (Oitylon) on the promontory of Tainaron by John Palaiologos; and as general administrator of the whole of the Despotate Constantine nominated Sophianos Eudaimonoioannes, who came of a well-known and influential Peloponnesian family.⁹ The local feudal aristocracy had for long resented having their freedom restricted by governors imposed upon them from Constantinople. Constantine tried to attract their loyalty by granting them privileges and parcels of land as fiefs. Three documents survive recording such grants of landed estates or confirming those made by previous Despots. They take the form of *argyroboulla* or silver bulls, as distinct from the *chrysoboulla* or golden bulls which only an emperor could issue.¹⁰ Two of them are signed by Constantine as Despot and Porphyrogenitus. He seems also to have tried to inspire some local patriotism and competitive spirit into the younger generation by staging athletic games at which races were run for prizes. He might have done better to follow Bessarion's advice by shipping some of the young men to Italy to discover that there was a wider world beyond the confines of the Morea and to learn some useful arts and crafts.

Constantine's own ambition for the future of the Despotate of the Morea did not square with Bessarion's view of the role that it might play in the counter-offensive against the Turks. He was a man of action more than an administrator; and in the summer of 1444, as soon as the work on the Hexamilion wall was finished, he went into action not against the Turks but against his Latin neighbours to the north of the Isthmus. He was no doubt

⁹ Zakythinos, *Despotat*, I, pp. 228–9.

¹⁰ Documents in Lambros, *PP*, IV, pp. 14–18. Zakythinos, *Despotat*, I, pp. 228–9; II, pp. 99–100, 109–15, 123.

encouraged by the news from the western Christian world. The pope's crusade had set out from Hungary down the Danube towards the Black Sea in 1443. Its progress had alarmed the Sultan Murad, who had other problems to deal with in the east. He begged for a truce. It was arranged at Szegedin in June 1444. Constantine was well informed about the circumstances, for in July he sent George Sphrantzes to confer with the leaders of the crusade, Ladislav of Hungary and Cardinal Cesarini. He was also in touch with the Venetian admiral Alvise Loredano, whose fleet was stationed at Modon in 1444. The truce of Szegedin lasted no more than a few months. Cardinal Cesarini, on the Pope's authority, absolved the crusaders from the oaths that they had sworn to the Sultan, and Ladislav and his army moved on to their objective. Cesarini knew of Constantine's intentions, that he was ready to strike at the Turks from the Morea.¹¹

Bessarion had urged Constantine to close the gates of Hellenism against the barbarians at the Hexamilion wall. He had not recommended extending the frontiers of the Despotate of the Morea to the north of that wall by crossing the Isthmus and invading his neighbours' lands, especially as his neighbours were fellow Christians united with him by the union of Florence. His excuse might be that they were, like himself, vassals of the Turks and that to relieve them of their property would embarrass the common enemy while he was on the defensive in other parts of eastern Europe. A few months after he heard that the pope's crusade was on the move, Constantine invaded Attica. The Duchy of Athens and Thebes, set up by the Franks after the Fourth Crusade, had seen a variety of foreign rulers. In the early fifteenth century it was held by the Florentine merchant family of Acciajuoli, albeit under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Sultan. Constantine had earlier thought to annex their territory. In 1435, when the Duke Antonio Acciajuoli died without heir, his widow had appealed to Constantine for help; and he had sent Sphrantzes to take over the Duchy. The Turks, however, had moved in quickly, occupied Thebes and forestalled Constantine's imperialist venture. In 1444 he believed that the moment had come to try again. The Duchy was now ruled by Nerio II Acciajuoli, still as a vassal of the

¹¹ Letter of Cesarini, ed. N. Jorga, *Notes et Extraits pour servir à l'histoire des Croisades au XV^e siècle*, III (Paris, 1902), p. 110. Zakythinos, *Despotat*, I, p. 230.

Sultan. The Turks were busy elsewhere. Nerio was unprepared for an invasion. Constantine and his army marched into Attica and forced Nerio to surrender Athens and Thebes and to pay to him the tribute which he had been paying to the Sultan. The capture of Athens seemed particularly glorious. One of Constantine's counsellors and flatterers was moved to compare him with Themistocles.¹² The pope's crusade got no further than Varna on the Black Sea coast. There it was annihilated by the Turks under the personal command of the Sultan Murad. King Ladislas was killed and Cardinal Cesarini too was among the innumerable dead.

Varna was a long way from the Morea and the news did not deter Constantine. His foray across the isthmus had been remarkably successful. He was enjoying himself. He had also found a new ally in the western world. Philip V, Duke of Burgundy, was an ardent supporter of war against the infidel. He had offered to supply ships for the crusade of Varna. He was eager to help the cause in Greece and he had been in friendly contact with Constantine's brother Theodore. In 1445 a company of 300 soldiers from Burgundy arrived in the Morea. Constantine welcomed them and at once took them with his own men to raid central Greece, through Boiotia, Phokis and as far north as the Pindos mountains in Thessaly, where the Vlachs and Albanians happily hailed him as their lord. The Venetian governor of Vitritza on the coast had to abandon his post.¹³ At the same time Constantine's own governor at Vostitza (Aigion), Constantine Cantacuzene, crossed over the Gulf of Corinth with a band of infantry and cavalry and drove the Turks out of several places in western Phokis. His greatest prize was the town of Loidoriki, whose inhabitants were so excited that they changed its name to Cantacuzinopolis. When Pope Eugenius heard of Cantacuzene's prowess, he interpreted it as a manifestation of zeal for the union of the churches and created him a Palatine Count of the Lateran.¹⁴

The Christians of the reunited church, however, were far from

¹² Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 52. John Dokeianos, *Letters to the Despot Constantine*, ed. Lambros, *PP*, I, p. 242. Zakythinos, *Despotat*, I, pp. 212, 230.

¹³ Chalkokondyles, II, pp. 91-2; Stefano Magno, *Estratti degli Annali Veneti di Stefano Magno*, ed. C. Hopf, *Chroniques gréco-romanes inédites ou peu connues* (Berlin, 1873), p. 195. On Constantine's campaigns in Attica and Boiotia, see Zakythinos, *Despotat*, I, pp. 230-1.

¹⁴ On Constantine Cantacuzene: Nicol, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos*, no. 81.

united among themselves, even in common cause against the infidel. Constantine's triumphs in central Greece were not universally admired. The Venetians were furious at the eviction of their governor from Vittrinitza. In April 1445 they instructed their captain in Naupaktos along the coast to protest most vigorously to Constantine and to demand the return of their colony as well as some prisoners of war whom he had taken.¹⁵ The King of Aragon and Naples, Alfonso V (1415–58), who was dreaming of reviving his ancestral domains in Italy and Greece, called to mind that he had a hereditary claim to the Duchy of Athens and Thebes which had once been held by the Catalans. He wrote a stiff letter to Constantine to put the record straight and sent an ambassador to take possession of the said Duchy.¹⁶ What ensued is not told. A few months later, however, an envoy from the Morea was to be found at Alfonso's court enquiring about a possible marriage between Constantine and a daughter of the King of Portugal.¹⁷ The Florentine Duke of Athens, on the other hand, who had been forced to do homage to Constantine, complained to his former lord and master, the Sultan Murad and appealed to him to help restore the status quo. The Sultan, fresh from his victory over the combined forces of western Christendom, in which many of his Christian vassals had taken part, regarded the Despot Constantine as a rebellious nuisance, a petty thorn in the side of his European empire. He would be glad to put a stop to the Despot's dreams of further conquest.

In the winter of 1446 Murad took command of an army said to have numbered 50,000 or 60,000 men. He led them through central Greece down to the Morea. With him went the aggrieved Duke of Athens and Thebes, Nerio Acciajuoli. One of the Sultan's generals took a detachment to Loidoriki and Galaxidi and extinguished the ephemeral glory of Cantacuzinopolis, reducing Phokis to a vassal province of the Turks. Constantine hurried back to his Despotate. He and his brother Thomas took their stand at the Hexamilion wall which they had rebuilt with such optimism. The Turkish army reached the wall on 27 November. After fierce fighting, Constantine sent a messenger to the Sultan to propose terms of

¹⁵ Thiriet, *Régestes*, III, no. 2686.

¹⁶ Text of letter in F. Cerone, 'La politica orientale di Alfonso di Aragona', *Archivio storico per le province napoletane*, 27 (1902), 430–1.

¹⁷ Lambros, in *NE*, 4 (1907), 431. Zakythinos, *Despotat*, I, p. 239.

peace. He was George Chalkokondyles, father of the later historian Laonikos. Murad had not come to negotiate. He threw the messenger into prison and demanded that the wall be dismantled without delay. Constantine refused. The Sultan gave him a few days to change his mind and then ordered his men to take up their stations along the whole length of the wall.

In the normal course of medieval warfare the Hexamilion wall could perhaps have been held. The times were not normal. The Sultan had with him some of the new weapons of heavy artillery in the form of long cannons. These too he positioned along the length of the wall to batter it down. He also had siege engines and scaling ladders. The Turkish guns made sure that the defenders would not dare show themselves on their battlements. A vivid account of the assault and defence is given by Chalkokondyles, who must have heard it from his father. After five days of fighting Murad signalled the final attack with a flurry of trumpets. His crack troops, the janissaries, were the first to scale the already crumbling wall; and on 10 December the Hexamilion was no more than a heap of ruins, its defenders killed or captured. The Despots Constantine and Thomas barely managed to escape the massacre. Three hundred men who had fled and taken refuge on a hill-top called Oxy near Kenchreai were tricked into surrender and slaughtered to a man. The pine trees were drenched in blood. The oracle had proved false.¹⁸

The Sultan then divided his army. Turahan Beg commanded one division with orders to march south towards Mistra and the lands of the Despot Constantine. Murad himself led the rest along the north coast of the Morea. The town of Sikyon was made to surrender and burnt to the ground. Its people were taken as prisoners to Vostitza. The Sultan marched on to Patras. Most of the city's inhabitants had fled across the water to take refuge with the Venetians in Naupaktos. About 4,000 men remained in the castle on the hill and they held out against repeated assaults by the Turks. It was of little consequence. The Sultan had come only to chastise the Greeks and to strike terror into them; and this he had done with great success. The time to complete the conquest and

¹⁸ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 70; Doukas, p. 279; Chalkokondyles, II, pp. 112–18. The chronology was established by Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, II, pp. 476–9. A Lament on the disaster and its consequences was composed by John Eugenikos, ed. G. Mercati, *Opere Minori*, IV (Studi e Testi, 79: Vatican City, 1937), pp. 25–8.

occupation of their country would come when he was ready. He left Patras and marched to Clarentza, where he was rejoined by Turahan and his troops. They had failed to reach Mistra. It was the wrong season of the year to try to take an army over the mountains. The Sultan and his men withdrew the way they had come, leaving the Morea devastated and depopulated. Contemporary Greek and Venetian sources agree that the number of Christian prisoners taken was 60,000.¹⁹ After the event there were those who blamed the destruction of the Hexamilion wall on the treachery of the Albanians in Constantine's army. Others distributed the charge of treachery more generally among all the people of the Morea, for whose security the wall had been built. Treachery there may have been. The Albanians were seldom reliable. The Greeks of the Morea had often been condemned for their indolence and lack of spirit. Yet for all the rhetoric of Plethon and Bessarion, the Hexamilion was probably indefensible against a determined and disciplined army; and it was bound to fall sooner or later beneath the pounding of artillery.

Constantine's sideshow in the great and tragic drama of the alliance of Christian powers against the infidel had ended in humiliation. He had fought on after the larger disaster at Varna. But the Christian powers had been too shattered to support him. Only Philip of Burgundy had sent him help. The Venetians, who had warships stationed at Modon, might have gone to his aid. But they could not forget how he had attacked their possessions in Greece. In February 1446 their Mediterranean fleet had received orders to sail for home. Putting business before heroics, they renewed their truce with the Turkish Sultan. A tale was later put about that Constantine agreed to marry a daughter of the Doge of Venice, Francesco Foscari (1429-57), feeling that this might give him some hold over the Venetian establishments in the Morea.²⁰ There is surely no truth in it. Venetian sources for the period are abundant. None mentions such a proposal; and Francesco Foscari was astute enough to see through any Greek ruse to undermine Venetian control in Greece. He distrusted the Greeks. He was more interested in keeping on good terms with the Sultan to ensure

¹⁹ Chalkokondyles, II, pp. 118-19. A later account gives the number of dead as 22,000; Lambros, in *NE*, 4 (1907), 25-6. Zakythinos, *Despotat*, I, pp. 232-5.

²⁰ D. M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice. A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 385-7. Lambros, *NE*, 4 (1907), 431-3, accepts the story.

that Venetian markets in Constantinople were not closed in the event, by now almost daily expected, that the Turks captured the city. Constantine and his brother Thomas were in no position to ask the Sultan for a truce. They were obliged to accept him as their lord and to pay him a yearly tribute for the privilege of salvaging the wreck of their lands and possessions; and they had to swear that never again would they rebuild the ruins of the Hexamilion wall.

The help that never came, or came too late, was a melancholy theme of Constantine's life. It may have brought some comfort to him in his hour of crisis to receive a letter full of praise and flattery from the Commune of Florence, where his brother the Emperor John had become a well-known and respected figure at the time of the council in 1439. The government, the citizens and the merchants of Florence declared themselves to be always at the service of the Despot Constantine. It was a strange gesture, for they must have known that he had recently dispossessed the last Florentine Duke of Athens. The letter is dated 3 May 1446. It was an empty promise and it came almost too late. The Turks broke through into the Morea in December of the same year.²¹

In the last year of his reign as Despot at Mistra, Constantine was visited by the Italian humanist and antiquarian Ciriaco of Ancona.²² Ciriaco was an indefatigable traveller and recorder of his journeys. They had led him once before to the Morea in 1437, when he had been entertained by Constantine's brother, the Despot Theodore II. He returned ten years later, coming south by land through Corinth and Leondari, where he met the Despot Thomas. At the end of July 1447 he reached the foothills of Mount Taygetos and arrived at Mistra, where he was welcomed by Constantine, whom he described as 'Constantine by name Dragaš of the royal house of Palaiologos, the ruling Despot'. At the court of Mistra he met the then elderly George Gemistos Plethon, 'the most learned doctor among the Greeks', whom he had met on his previous visit. He also met Nicholas, alias Laonikos, Chalkokondyles, the future historian and son of George Chalkokondyles,

²¹ Letter from Florence: Lambros, *NE*, 4 (1907), 31.

²² On Ciriaco (Cyriacus) of Ancona: R. Sabbadini, 'Ciriaco d'Ancona e la sua descrizione autografa del Peloponneso trasmessa da Leonardo Botta', *Miscellanea Ceriani* (Milan, 1910), pp. 180-247; E. W. Bodnar, *Cyriacus of Ancona and Athens* (Collection Latomus, XLIII: Brussels, 1960).

whom he had known in Athens and who had been imprisoned by the Sultan the year before. The young Laonikos kindly took Ciriaco to revisit the ruins and monuments of ancient Sparta in the plain below Mistra. For it was the vestiges of ancient Greece that he had come to see and record, not the buildings of what was to him the modern city of Mistra. Early in October he continued his journey down to Messenia in search of Nestor's palace at Pylos. He crossed by sea from Coron to the fortress of Vitylo on the promontory of Tainaron, where he met John Palaiologos, Constantine's governor in that district. From the harbour of Gythion he returned over the hills to Mistra, where he spent the winter of 1447-8. There, in February 1448, he composed an account of the ancient Roman Calendar for the Despot Constantine, describing him as 'Constantine Palaiologos Porphyrogenitus and most excellent emperor (*basilea*) of Lakedaimonia'.²³ In March Ciriaco was in Nauplion and by April in Corinth, where he was received by John Cantacuzene, Constantine's friend and governor of the city, whom he had met before at Patras.

The world owes a debt to Ciriaco of Ancona for his assiduous collection of information about the ruins and remains of Greek antiquity, of inscriptions and of clues to the identification of ancient sites. He has been called the father of modern archaeology. Indeed he lived in the past and he seldom turned his attention to the conditions of Greece or the Morea as he found them in the fifteenth century. His stay at Mistra afforded him the satisfaction of gazing down on the site of ancient Sparta and musing on its change of fortune. He wrote an epigram on its past heroic glories, now shrunk to the little measure of Mistra under Constantine ('Misythra sub Constantino').²⁴

The Turks had come down on the Morea like wolves in the winter before the visit of Ciriaco. They had destroyed the Hexamilion wall for ever. They had sacked and plundered the towns along their way. But it was winter weather that had saved Mistra from their ravages; and it was the winter that had saved the crops and enabled the people to survive. In the summer of 1447

²³ Ed. Lambros, *PP*, IV, pp. 98-9; Bodnar, *Cyriacus*, pp. 57-9, 61; A. Diller, 'The Autographs of Georgius Gemistus Pletho', *Scriptorium*, 10 (1956), 27-41; Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, pp. 227-8.

²⁴ The epigram was turned into Greek, perhaps by Plethon. Lambros, *PP*, IV, pp. 99-101. Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, p. 227.

Ciriaco was impressed by the plentiful harvest. It seemed that there might still be hope for the future. Constantine never abandoned that hope. He knew, however, that the future of the Despotate as well as of Constantinople depended on the perpetuation of the ruling house of Palaiologos. His brother, the Emperor John VIII, had never had children to succeed him and by 1447 he was in poor health. His brothers Theodore and Demetrios had fathered but one daughter apiece. Only his brother Thomas had sons, Andrew and Manuel, but they were yet to be born. Constantine's two marriages had come to abrupt and tragic ends. His family and his advisers were keen that he should take a third wife. As early as 1444 there had been talk of his marrying Isabella Orsini, sister of the Prince of Taranto, whose hereditary connections with the islands and mainland of Greece were strong. Nothing came of it.²⁵ In August 1447 the faithful George Sphrantzes was sent to Constantinople to explore the possibilities of arranging a marriage contract for his master either with the Empire of Trebizond or with the Kingdom of Georgia. The negotiations took time and they were overtaken by events.²⁶

In June 1448 Constantine's brother Theodore died in his principality at Selymbria. On 31 October of the same year the Emperor John VIII died.²⁷ The potential successors to the throne of Constantinople had been narrowed down to three: Constantine and his brothers Demetrios and Thomas. Everyone knew that the candidate most favoured by the late Emperor was Constantine. He had said as much on his deathbed. Everyone knew too that his mother, the Dowager Empress Helena Palaiologina, was of the same mind. In the end it was her will that prevailed.

²⁵ Lambros, in *NE*, 4 (1907), 431.

²⁶ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 70.

²⁷ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 72; Doukas, p. 279; Chalkokondyles, II, pp. 111–13, 140; Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, II, pp. 470–4.

3 * CONSTANTINE: EMPEROR AT CONSTANTINOPLE

The news of the Emperor's death came to Constantine at Mistra. He must have known that his brothers Thomas and Demetrios were nearer the scene and that either might forestall him by making a bid for the succession to the throne. Thomas reached Constantinople on 13 November; Demetrios hurried to the capital from Selymbria. Thomas was perhaps not a serious rival. Demetrios, however, had many supporters; for he represented, or claimed to represent, the interests of the powerful anti-unionist faction who looked for an Emperor who would wipe away the shame of the Union of Florence. They would have welcomed Demetrios as Emperor since it was his declared policy to disown the union of the churches which had caused so much bitterness and brought so little reward. It was the resolute action of the Emperor's mother Helena which averted a crisis and prevented the possibility of civil war. Helena, widow of Manuel II, asserted her right to act as regent until Constantine, the eldest of her surviving sons, reached Constantinople. He had always been her favourite and had always been proud to bear her Serbian family name of Dragaš or Dragases as well as his father's name of Palaiologos. Thomas readily accepted her decision and Demetrios was overruled. Both joined her in proclaiming Constantine as the new Emperor of the Romans. The first to be informed was the Ottoman Sultan Murad II; and in December the Empress sent Sphrantzes to secure his approval for the appointment of Constantine.¹

Once the matter of the succession had been peacefully resolved, the Empress nominated two envoys to sail at once for the Morea to invest Constantine as Emperor and escort him back to Constantinople. They were Alexios Philanthropenos Laskaris and Manuel Palaiologos Iagros and they took with them Constantine's brother Thomas. They were evidently empowered to conduct a proclamation and investiture of the new Emperor, though not to

¹ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 72; Doukas, p. 279; Chalkokondyles, II, p. 141.

perform his coronation. No doubt, the army, the people and the elders of Mistra were flattered to be asked to enact the customary acclamation which preceded the crowning of an Emperor by the Patriarch. There was no Patriarch at Mistra; and there is no evidence to support the view that the local bishop took it upon himself to stage a coronation ceremony in one of the churches. The title of Emperor of the Romans was conferred upon Constantine Palaiologos in a civil ceremony, perhaps in the palace of the Despots, on 6 January 1449. It is for this reason that the historian Doukas makes the point that Constantine was never crowned as Emperor and gives it as his opinion that John VIII was the last Emperor of the Romans.²

There were historical precedents for such procedure. The Emperor Manuel I Komnenos had been proclaimed and invested by his dying father in Cilicia, far from the capital. John VI Cantacuzene, Constantine's great-grandfather, was first proclaimed and invested with the imperial robes and headgear at Didymoteichon in Thrace on 26 October 1341. No crown was placed upon his head. With his own hands he put on the imperial headgear (*pilon*) which had been lying before an icon of the Virgin.³ Much the same simple ceremony may have been enacted by Constantine at Mistra. Both Manuel I and John VI, however, had been careful to arrange for a full coronation ceremony to be performed by the Patriarch of Constantinople as soon as they had gained control of the city. In the case of Constantine Palaiologos the ecclesiastical rite of coronation was never performed. It would have caused dangerous disorder. The new Emperor had shown no sign of disowning the union of Florence. There was no Patriarch to crown him at Mistra and many believed that there was no real Patriarch of Constantinople. The Patriarch Gregory III was a committed unionist. For him to set the seal of the church's approval on Constantine by crowning him Emperor in the cathedral of the Holy Wisdom might well have provoked the anti-unionists to riot.

Most of them in any case declined to enter the cathedral as long as the Patriarch Gregory remained in office. Among them was John

² Doukas, p. 293. Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 72, says simply that the two emissaries to Mistra 'made Constantine Emperor'. Only the later Phrantzes, *Chron. maius*, pp. 348-50, says that they performed the coronation.

³ Kantakouzenos, II, pp. 165-6; Gregoras, II, pp. 611, 625.

Eugenikos, brother of the fanatically Orthodox Bishop Mark of Ephesos, who had refused to sign the decree of union at Florence. In an address to Constantine as Emperor in 1450, John explained why so many people consistently refused to commemorate his name in church. An emperor, he said, should be the prop of his subjects and the defender and champion of the true faith in their church. At the moment of his coronation and anointment with the holy chrism, he must make a written profession of his faith and swear an oath to uphold Orthodoxy. But who, he asked, is there now to crown you or anoint you or accept your profession of faith? We have an Emperor without a crown, one whose head is dignified only by a meaningless kind of hat (*pilon*): and we have a government that rates ships and money and aid from the west higher than the purity of the faith, setting human fear above the fear of God. John Eugenikos reminded Constantine of the steadfastness in the faith of his ancestor Theodora, widow of Michael VIII, and of her son Andronikos II, and similarly of his much respected father Manuel II; and he urged him to follow their example and be a worthy successor of the first Constantine, the equal of the Apostles, in professing and defending the true faith uncontaminated by the errors of the Latins.⁴

Others, however, were prepared to accept Constantine as their lawful Emperor because of his lineage and also because there was no evident alternative; and he had his eloquent supporters, some of whom no doubt courted his favour by their flattery. John Dokeianos, the scholar and bibliophile of Mistra who had once compared him to Themistocles, wrote an encomium of him. It is almost wholly rhetorical bombast, but it praises Constantine's prowess as a huntsman, a horseman and a soldier, recalling his brilliant campaign at Patras and his successful months as regent in Constantinople during his brother's long absence in Italy. Dokeianos also delivered an address to Constantine when he was

⁴ John Eugenikos, *Address to the Emperor Constantine*, ed. Lambros, *PP*, I, pp. 123–34. *PLP*, III, no. 6189. On Theodora Palaiologina, widow of Michael VIII, see *PLP*, IX, no. 21380. The question of Constantine's coronation is discussed by: I. Bogiatzides, *Tò ζήτημα τῆς στέψεως Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ Παλαιολόγου*, *Laographia*, 7 (1923), 449–56; Aikaterini Christophilopoulou, 'Ἐκλογή, ἀναγόμεναι καὶ στέψαι τοῦ Βυζαντινοῦ αὐτοκράτορος (Athens, 1956), pp. 204–6; Margaret Carroll, 'Constantine XI Palaeologus: Some Problems of Image', *Maistor. Classical, Byzantine and Renaissance Studies for Robert Browning*, ed. Ann Moffatt (Canberra, 1984), pp. 329–43, especially pp. 333–8; Margaret Carroll, *A Contemporary Greek Source for the Siege of Constantinople 1453: The Sphrantzes Chronicle* (Amsterdam, 1985), pp. 94–6.

raised to the throne.⁵ John Argyropoulos, a younger scholar, wrote an oration to Constantine when he arrived in Constantinople to 'take the sceptre' from his late brother, as well as an address which is mainly a eulogy of John VIII; and, somewhat presumptuously, he presented the new Emperor with a *Basilikos* or Essay on Kingship, probably the last of its kind in Byzantine literature. In it he describes Constantine as 'the greatest of emperors and now, by good fortune, Emperor of the Hellenes'. His choice of words may well betray the influence of Gemistos Plethon.⁶ Michael Apostolis, a pupil of Argyropoulos and of Plethon, sent an address to Constantine as Emperor, enclosing a profession of his own faith. Constantine Laskaris, on the other hand, another student of Argyropoulos, who had been captured by the Turks in 1453 and escaped to Italy, was less sure of Constantine's credentials and declared that he had been proclaimed but never crowned as Emperor.⁷ While Demetrios Katadoukinos, otherwise known as Katablattas, hailed Constantine as Emperor on the occasion of his arrival at Constantinople in March 1449.⁸

Opinion was divided about Constantine's imperial status. The division was mainly between those who approved and those who condemned his policy of union with the Roman church; though there were clearly some who praised him merely to win his patronage. Argyropoulos was certainly a committed unionist and later travelled widely in the west, earning a doctorate in Padua and teaching Greek in Florence. He was one of those, like Bessarion and Apostolis, in love with the new humanism in Italy. John Eugenikos took the opposite view. But even he described Constantine as 'the best and most holy of emperors' and once, perhaps by oversight, as the 'God-crowned Emperor'. The hierarchy of the Orthodox church, however, who were mostly of a like mind with Eugenikos, would not confirm or sanction the

⁵ John Dokeianos, *Encomium and Address*, ed. Lambros, *PP*, I, pp. 221-31, 232-5. *PLP*, III, no. 5577.

⁶ John Argyropoulos, *Works*, ed. Sp. P. Lambros, Ἀργυροπούλεια (Athens, 1910), pp. 8-28, 29-47. His address to Constantine, ed. Lambros, *PP*, IV, pp. 67-82, is there wrongly attributed to Michael Apostolis. *PLP*, I, no. 1267.

⁷ Michael Apostolis, *Address*, ed. Lambros, *PP*, IV, pp. 83-7. *PLP*, I, no. 1201; Constantine Laskaris, *Chronicle*, ed. Sp. P. Lambros, in Ἐπιστημονικὴ Ἐπετηρὶς Ἐθνικὸν Πανεπιστήμιον, III: 1906-7 (Athens, 1909), 150-227, especially 226.

⁸ Katablattas was the butt of the invective composed by John Argyropoulos, ed. P. Canivet and N. Oikonomides, '[John Argyropoulos] La Comédie de Katablattas. Invective byzantine du XV^e siècle', *Diptycha*, 3 (1982-3), 85-6.

constitutional position of the new Emperor until he had been through the customary ceremony of ecclesiastical coronation. That could not safely be performed by the unionist Patriarch Gregory III; and Constantine was wise to keep quiet about the matter. In his own mind he was none the less convinced that his proclamation and investiture at Mistra had sufficed to give him the constitutional rights of the one true Emperor, not of the Hellenes but of the Romans. His first known official document as such was a chrysobull issued in February 1449 before he left Mistra for Constantinople, granting favours to the sons of Gemistos Plethon. It bears his signature as Constantine Palaiologos in Christ true Emperor and Autokrator of the Romans. It was the proudest of all imperial titles and Constantine XI was the last to bear it.⁹

Early in January 1449 he had written to the Venetian Duke of Candia in Crete, Antonio Diedo, to announce the death of his brother John VIII and the fact of his own succession to the throne. He asked the favour of a safe passage to Constantinople on a Venetian ship. The Duke of Candia replied promptly and courteously, on 9 January, correctly addressing Constantine as 'illustrissime et serenissime imperator' and expressing sympathy on the death of his brother. It so happened that the Venetian Captain of the Gulf, the commander of the Adriatic fleet, was then at Candia; and the Duke assured Constantine that he would shortly be sailing for Modon in the Morea, where he could obtain the necessary mandate from the Venetian authorities to fulfil the Emperor's request as soon as possible.¹⁰ Given the strained relations between the Despots of the Morea and the Venetians it was a pleasant exchange of courtesies. In the event, however, it seems that Constantine made his journey to the capital on a Catalan ship. Perhaps he could not wait for the Venetians to complete their formalities. It is none the less a measure of the feeble state of the Byzantine Empire that its new Emperor had to call on the help of foreigners to get from Greece to Constantinople.¹¹

He arrived on 12 March 1449. Two weeks later he took the first and most necessary step to secure his position by arranging a truce

⁹ Text in J. and P. Zepos, ed., *Jus Graecoromanum*, I (Athens, 1931), pp. 705–7. DR, V, no. 3521. Zakythinos, *Despotat*, I, p. 240. It is noteworthy that the few surviving seals and coins of Constantine depict him crowned as Emperor. See below, pp. 70–2.

¹⁰ DR, V, no. 3520.

¹¹ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 74.

with the Turks, sending Andronikos Iagaris as his ambassador to the Sultan. The truce was designated to include his brothers, thus protecting the Morea from further attacks, at least for a time.¹² In some ways it was easier for him to deal with the Turks than with the native Byzantine opposition, the anti-unionists. He was patient with them and tried more than once to talk them round by holding discussions. John Eugenikos sent him the minutes of one such meeting in the form of an apologia from the leaders of the anti-Roman Orthodox community in Constantinople. They had organised themselves as a Synaxis or synod in opposition to the synod headed by the Patriarch whom they refused to recognise.¹³ Constantine was not a fanatical advocate of the union of Florence. But he remained convinced that it held out the hope of survival. Only if they were seen to be upholding it could he and his people hope to secure from western Christendom the practical help which they so desperately needed. The anti-unionists saw this as a basely materialistic argument. It was clear to them, as John Eugenikos had said, that the Emperor and his government would do better to trust in God than to pin their hopes on rescue coming from the Latins. Those who had betrayed the faith of their fathers for the sake of material rewards would surely forfeit the blessing and the help of God.

By far the most learned member of the anti-unionist Synaxis was George Scholarios, who had been a pupil of Mark Eugenikos. He had dedicated his Commentaries on Aristotle to Constantine while he was still Despot at Mistra.¹⁴ He had been a prominent member of the Byzantine delegation at the Council of Florence and shown himself to be an eloquent supporter of the union of the churches, composing tracts in favour of Latin theology and doctrine. After the council he continued to serve the Emperor John VIII as secretary and for some years he avoided all controversy. Under the influence of his former teacher Mark Eugenikos, however, he began to change his views; and when Mark died in April 1445, Scholarios inherited his role as spokesman of the anti-unionist party. The death of John VIII affected him deeply; and when Constantine arrived in the capital, Scholarios became a monk. He

¹² Doukas, p. 279. *DR*, V, no. 3524.

¹³ John Eugenikos, ed. Lambros, *PP*, I, pp. 151-3.

¹⁴ George Scholarios (Gennadios), *Œuvres complètes de Gennade Scholarios*, ed. L. Petit, X. A. Siderides, M. Jugie (Paris, 1928-36), VII, pp. 1-6.

announced his intention to do so in a sermon which he preached, while still a layman, before the Emperor on 21 November 1449.¹⁵ He explained his reasons for thus retreating from the world in a long letter to Constantine.¹⁶ He entered one of the city monasteries and took the monastic name of Gennadios. As a monk he had more leisure and more influence. He composed yet more tracts and treatises, now expounding not the virtues but the errors of Latin theology, at first privately and discreetly, later with more publicity and greater abandon. As the monk Gennadios he kept up a friendly correspondence with Constantine for a while.¹⁷ He was in due course to become the first Patriarch of Constantinople under Ottoman rule after the fall of the city to the Turks in 1453. But in the last years of Byzantine Constantinople he became an embarrassment to the last Christian Emperor. Unlike others of his persuasion, Gennadios was not unconditionally opposed to union with the Roman church, whose doctrine he understood better than most Greeks. But he believed that the union must be effected through reconciliation and reason, by tolerance and persuasion, not under the duress of political circumstances and pressure from the Roman side.¹⁸ Nor did he express any doubts about Constantine's status as Emperor for all that he had never been crowned by a Patriarch.

Once Constantine had been installed as Emperor the question of the perpetuation of the ruling dynasty of Palaiologos was more urgent than ever. The search was intensified for a wife and Empress who might give him a son. In February 1449, while still at Mistra, he sent an envoy to Italy to see King Alfonso V of Aragon and Naples, with whom he had earlier had dealings. The envoy, Manuel Dishypatos, was instructed to ask for help against the Turks, but also to sound the ground about a marriage alliance. The proposal was that the Emperor Constantine should marry Beatrice, a daughter of Pedro, King of Portugal, who was Alfonso's nephew. It was further suggested that Pedro's brother might marry the daughter of John II of Lusignan, King of Cyprus. She was Constantine's niece. The second of these proposals was realised in 1456 when Carlotta, daughter of John II of Lusignan, became the wife of Juan, Duke of Coimbra and son of Pedro of Portugal. But

¹⁵ Scholarios, I, pp. 161-72.

¹⁷ Scholarios, IV, pp. 474-5.

¹⁶ Scholarios, IV, pp. 463-73.

¹⁸ Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, pp. 116-17.

for reasons unknown nothing came of the plan for Constantine to marry into the royal house of Portugal.¹⁹

There were, however, other eligible ladies nearer the Byzantine world. In August 1447 George Sphrantzes had been sent from Mistra to Constantinople to explore the possibilities of a marriage contract either with the Kingdom of Georgia or with the Empire of Trebizond.²⁰ Princesses from the imperial family of Trebizond had married into the family of Palaiologos before. That, however, might prove to be an impediment since the Byzantine church, which Constantine could not risk offending, was very strict about the prohibited degrees of marriage. In October 1449 Sphrantzes left Constantinople to visit both Georgia and Trebizond and to come to a decision about which ruling family could offer the more suitable bride for his Emperor. He was away for nearly two years. In his memoirs he gives a long and fascinating account of his travels on his master's service. He did not go alone. He was accompanied by an impressive retinue of young noblemen, soldiers, priests, monks, physicians, singers and musicians with their instruments; and he carried a variety of expensive gifts. The Georgians were intrigued by the musical instruments and came from far and wide to hear them played. Sphrantzes was instructed to send back written reports on the merits and demerits of each prospective bride so that Constantine could make the final decision himself and report back by messenger.²¹

He went first to the court of George VIII of Georgia (Iberia) who reigned as *de facto* king from 1446 to 1465. The name of his daughter who was to be inspected for her suitability is not recorded.²² Unfortunately, the system of communication broke down when Constantine's messenger was shipwrecked off Amisos and Sphrantzes was obliged to wait for further orders to come from his replacement. At Trebizond he visited the court of the Emperor John IV Komnenos (1429–58), who was himself related by marriage to the King of Georgia and also to Constantine's late

¹⁹ Sp. P. Lambros, 'Ο Κωνσταντίνος Παλαιολόγος ὡς σύζυγος ἐν τῇ ἱστορίᾳ καὶ τοῖς θρύλοις, *NE*, 4 (1907), 417–66, especially 433–40.

²⁰ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 70.

²¹ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 74. Carroll, 'Constantine XI', *Maistor*, pp. 337–8, suggests that Constantine delayed his coronation until he found an Empress to be his consort.

²² C. Toumanoff, 'The Fifteenth-Century Bagratids and the Institution of Collegial Sovereignty in Georgia', *Traditio*, 7 (1949–51), 169–221.

brother John, for his sister Maria had been John VIII's third wife.²³ It was at Trebizond that Sphrantzes first heard of the recent death of the Ottoman Sultan Murad II, in February 1451. The Emperor of Trebizond thought that it was welcome news. Sphrantzes, however, was anxious about the future. Murad had been old and tired. He had given up any thought of conquering Constantinople. He wanted only peace and friendship with the Byzantines. His son and heir Mehmed II, on the other hand, was young, vigorous and ambitious and known to be hostile to the Christian cause. It occurred to Sphrantzes that one way of keeping the new Sultan in check was to suggest that his stepmother, Murad's widow, should now marry Constantine.²⁴

Murad II's widow, or the *amerissa* as Sphrantzes calls her, was Maria or Mara Branković, daughter of the Serbian Despot George Branković. He had married her in 1436.²⁵ She had no children. When her husband died at Adrianople she asked to be allowed to return to her parents in Serbia. She was already there when Sphrantzes conceived the plan of seeking her hand in marriage to the Emperor Constantine. He committed the idea to writing and sent it with his report on his activities in Georgia and Trebizond to the Emperor in Constantinople. He declared that he could see only four possible objections to the marriage: Maria Branković might be considered socially inferior to the Emperor; the church might object on the grounds of their kinship and consanguinity; she was already a widow; and she was getting on in years and might have difficulty in bearing a child. The first objection he thought to be unworthy, for Constantine's own mother was of the same Serbian race; the church would be more likely to sanction the Emperor's marriage into the Serbian family than to a princess from Trebizond, since the Despot George Branković was a most pious benefactor of the church, its monasteries and its charities. A precedent existed to counter the third objection; for Constantine's own grandfather, Constantine Dragaš, had married a widow, Eudokia, whose former husband had been a petty Turkish chieftain, and she had even borne children by him. Maria

²³ Nicol, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos*, no. 62.

²⁴ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, pp. 76–8.

²⁵ On Maria-Mara Branković, see Nicol, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos*, no. 92; I. A. Papadrianos, 'The Marriage-Arrangement between Constantine XI Palaiologos and the Serbian Mara (1451)', *Balkan Studies*, 6 (1965), 131–8.

Branković, by contrast, was the widow of a powerful monarch and it was widely believed that their marriage had never been consummated. As to the chance of her bearing children, only God could decide.²⁶

Constantine was delighted when he received Sphrantzes' letter and report at the end of May 1451. He had begun to think that his usually faithful servant had been dallying on his journey. His own family was already connected with the Serbian house of Branković, for his niece Helena, daughter of his brother Thomas, had married Lazar, son of George and brother of Maria, in 1446.²⁷ Constantine at once sent an ambassador to Serbia to put the plan before George Branković and his wife Eirene. He entrusted the mission to Manuel Palaiologos who was related to the Cantacuzene family to which Eirene belonged. Some of Constantine's advisers in Constantinople felt that he would do well to marry the Sultan's widow. Others, like his Grand Domestic Andronikos Cantacuzene, thought that he would do better to marry into the imperial family of Trebizond. The proposal was welcomed by George Branković and his wife, who saw a great future for their unhappy daughter as Empress of Constantinople. But it foundered on the objections of Maria herself; for she had vowed that if God ever released her from the hands of the infidel she would lead a life of celibacy and chastity for the rest of her days.

Nothing would change her mind. For reasons which he does not make clear, Sphrantzes had meanwhile decided that his Emperor should marry the lady from Georgia rather than the princess of Trebizond and he had begun to draw up the marriage contract with the Georgian king. Armed with the draft of this document he returned to Constantinople on a Venetian ship and arrived on 14 September 1451, bringing with him a Georgian ambassador. It seemed that the quest for an Empress was at last ended. Constantine thanked Sphrantzes profusely for his tireless efforts and promised him various rewards. Without delay he had a formal document prepared for the Georgian ambassador to take with him, signed, sealed with gold and confirmed with three crosses in red ink according to Georgian custom. It was agreed that

²⁶ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, pp. 78–80. On Constantine Dragaš and his wife Eudokia, see *PLP*, III, nos. 5746, 6229.

²⁷ Nicol, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos*, no. 96.

Sphrantzes should go back to Georgia the following spring with ships to escort the future bride of Constantine to the capital. No more was heard of the matter. Once again Constantine's plans were overtaken by events.²⁸

His mother, the Dowager Empress Helena Palaiologina, died on 23 March 1450.²⁹ She had been a widow for twenty-five years and had lived the last fourteen years of her life as a nun with the name of Hypomoni. Her retirement had not meant that she played no further part in affairs of state. As regent after the death of John VIII, she had acted firmly to resolve the conflict between her other sons. Her passing was much mourned. Gennadios Scholarios and Gemistos Plethon both wrote funeral orations for her.³⁰ Gennadios addressed his words of comfort to her son, 'the most serene Emperor Constantine'. Plethon praised her for her fortitude in adversity and her more than womanly intellect; and for her prudence he compared her to Penelope. He praised her too for the character of her sons without glossing over the fact that, though they generally lived in harmony, they had their disagreements. He used the occasion for a philosophical reflection on the nature of death and on the immortality of the divine part of man, which is one of the most interesting of his minor works. Bessarion had earlier composed some verses addressed to her son Theodore, extolling the virtues of Helena and of her late husband Manuel II in their imperial and secular as well as their monastic lives, for Manuel too had died as a monk.³¹

Constantine was the only one of her six sons who had adopted Helena's Serbian family name of Dragaš, and he had often looked to her for comfort and advice. He missed her. His ministers and counsellors seemed at times to be at odds with him. George Sphrantzes gives the impression that he alone was consistently reliable. Constantine's Grand Domestic or commander-in-chief, Andronikos Cantacuzene, disagreed with him on a number of matters. He was a brother-in-law of George Branković of Serbia, yet he disliked the Serbians, probably because they did not share

²⁸ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, pp. 80–2.

²⁹ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 76. Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, II, p. 478; *PLP*, IX, no. 21366.

³⁰ Scholarios, I, pp. 262–70, and Lambros, *PP*, II, pp. 40–51; Plethon, ed. Lambros, *PP*, III, pp. 266–80. A rhetorical tribute was also paid to the late Empress by John Argyropoulos in an address of condolence to Constantine, ed. Lambros, *Ἀργυροπούλεια*, pp. 48–57.

³¹ Bessarion, ed. Lambros, *PP*, III, pp. 281–3. Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, pp. 309–12.

his own enthusiasm for the union of Florence. It was his opinion that the Emperor should marry the princess from Trebizond and not Maria Branković.³² Constantine's old friend and confidant John Cantacuzene, who had been governor of Patras and of Corinth in earlier years and had accompanied him to Constantinople in 1449, shared this view, though in other respects he was a loyal and valuable servant of his Emperor.³³ Another member of the same family, whose death before 1451 was lamented by Constantine, was Manuel Cantacuzene, the *protostrator*. His widow, the *protostratorissa*, had done her best to promote the Emperor's marriage to Maria Branković.³⁴ The most powerful figure at Constantine's court was the Grand Duke or High Admiral Loukas Notaras.³⁵ Sphrantzes disliked him and was jealous of his wealth and of his position and influence. Notaras was an elder statesman with greater experience. He had been prime minister for John VIII and had been made Grand Duke before Constantine came to the throne. Perhaps with an eye to the future, he had taken out Genoese as well as Venetian citizenship; and he kept some of his considerable fortune in Italian banks. There was in fact much jostling for position among the leading courtiers, which Sphrantzes records and in which he participated. Constantine was a resolute man with a mind of his own. But it was hard for him to make firm decisions when his advisers were divided among themselves.³⁶

Sphrantzes had been right about the new Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II. He was more dangerous than he seemed. He was only nineteen years old when he succeeded his father in February 1451 and for a time he concealed his aggressive nature behind a façade of good will. It was generally reported among the Christians of east and west that Mehmed was an immature and ineffectual young man who could be cajoled or outwitted. Constantine had been quick to send ambassadors to make friends and arrange a truce. It is said that the Sultan received them with great respect and put their minds at rest with dramatic declarations of his good intent. He swore by Allah and the Prophet, by the Koran, by the angels and archangels to live at peace with the city of

³² On Andronikos Cantacuzene: Nicol, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos*, no. 68.

³³ On John Cantacuzene: *ibid.*, no. 80.

³⁴ On Manuel Cantacuzene: *ibid.*, no. 63.

³⁵ On Loukas Notaras: *PLP*, VIII, no. 20730.

³⁶ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, pp. 84, 90-4.

Constantinople and its Emperor Constantine for the rest of his life, nurturing the friendship that his late father had enjoyed with Constantine's brother John VIII.³⁷ Constantine was not fooled. He suspected that the young Sultan's mood could abruptly change. The wisest course, as Sphrantzes would have advised him, was to be prepared for that moment by seeing to the defences of Constantinople and calling again on the help of his friends in the west.

The Venetians, with their huge commercial colony in Constantinople, were the nearest and the most concerned. But their concerns were selfish. In the first months of his reign Constantine had decreed that new taxes should be levied on the goods which they and other merchants imported into the city. In August 1450 they sent a deputy from Venice to protest and threatened to close their quarter in Constantinople and transfer their trade elsewhere, perhaps to a port that was already in Turkish control. In October Constantine wrote to the Doge Francesco Foscari to explain why he had imposed higher taxes. The imperial treasury was perilously low. More sources of revenue had to be found. The Venetians were not convinced. There were further angry exchanges in 1451. When the Sultan Murad died the Doge sent a mission to congratulate his son on his succession; and a few months later a formal treaty was signed between Mehmed II and the Republic of Venice. Constantine must have felt that the Venetians would always put their own interests before those of the city that had made them rich. They would always hedge their bets against the day when that city might be in Turkish hands.³⁸

He must look for other allies. Twenty years earlier he had approached the commune of Ragusa (Dubrovnik). In 1451 he offered their merchants a depot in Constantinople with limited tax concessions and under a consul of their own. He confirmed these rights in a chrysobull for Ragusa in June.³⁹ It was a move calculated to annoy the Venetians and unlikely to elicit any military assistance for the defence of what was left of the Empire.

³⁷ Doukas, p. 289; Chalkokondyles, II, p. 142; Kritoboulos, *Critobuli Imbriotae Historiae*, ed. D. R. Reinsch (CFHB, XXII: Berlin–New York, 1983), p. 18. DR, V, no. 3530.

³⁸ Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, pp. 390–2.

³⁹ 1449, 1450 and 1451: DR, V, nos. 3524a, 3526. Krekić, *Dubrovnik*, pp. 59–61, nos. 1144, 1174, 1175, 1193, 1195, 1196, 1197, 1198, 1199, 1216, 1217, 1222. For Constantine's dealings with Ragusa in 1431, see above, p. 12.

Elsewhere in western Europe the memory of the disaster at Varna in 1444 was still fresh in men's minds. It had weakened their romantic resolve to go crusading against the infidel. Most of the potentates of the west were in any case otherwise occupied in wars of their own; and they were comforted by the news that Murad, the butcher of Varna, was dead and that the new Sultan Mehmed was young and irresolute. The only western monarch who continued to show concern for the fate of Constantinople was Alfonso V of Aragon and Naples. At the beginning of 1451 Constantine sent an ambassador to see Alfonso to lend encouragement to his plans for another crusade. He tactfully refrained from suggesting what he must surely have known, that Alfonso's dream was to make himself Emperor of Constantinople.⁴⁰

Even the papacy seems to have been lulled into a false sense of security by the news from the east. Eugenius IV had died in 1447. Early in April 1451 Constantine sent Andronikos Bryennios Leontaris to call on his successor, Nicholas V. Andronikos went by way of Venice, where he at least was granted permission for his Emperor to recruit some bowmen from Crete. He went on to Ferrara where he presented a letter from Constantine to the Marquis, Borso d'Este.⁴¹ By August he was in Rome. He had with him a statement from the Synaxis or synod of the anti-unionist clergy in Constantinople. Constantine had ordered them to write it after he had sat through one of their discussions. He hoped that the pope would read it and appreciate the problems that he faced in making the union of the churches acceptable in Byzantium. The signatories of the statement declared their rejection of the decree produced at Florence and proposed that a new council be held at Constantinople where the Orthodox would not be outnumbered. As if to emphasise the nature of the Emperor's problems, word reached Rome at about the same time that the unionist Patriarch, Gregory III, had resigned. The opposition had proved too much for him and he was on his way to Italy. Pope Nicholas replied to the Emperor on 27 September 1451. His message was simply to the effect that Constantine could and should try harder to convince his

⁴⁰ *Dr*, V, no. 3529.

⁴¹ The Latin text of Constantine's letter to the Marquis of Ferrara is in Lambros, *PP*, IV, pp. 26-7. Zakythinios, *Despotat*, I, pp. 283-4.

clergy and his people that the price of further practical help from western Christendom was their unequivocal acceptance of the union of Florence. The Patriarch Gregory must be reinstated and the pope's name must be properly commemorated in the Greek churches. Greeks who could not be brought to accept these terms should be sent to Rome for a course of educational treatment. The Emperor's ambassador Andronikos Leontaris concluded his mission by calling on Alfonso V at Naples, but without much enthusiasm and with little success. He went back to Constantinople towards the end of the year.⁴²

The pope's ultimatum brought little cheer to Constantine. He had done his best to enforce the union without causing riots in the streets of Constantinople. He had tried to make the pope understand his difficulties by sending him a document drafted and signed by his opponents. The pope had appeared to ignore it. The tension in Constantinople grew worse when word got about that Pope Nicholas intended to send a papal legate to celebrate the union of Florence in St Sophia. The rumour was not without foundation. It was seized upon by Gennadios Scholarios who wrote a long letter to Constantine in March 1452. What he had heard was that a representative was to come from the pope who would be empowered to excommunicate the Byzantines if they refused publicly to accept the union, recall the Patriarch Gregory and commemorate the pope's name in their services. It was an added insult that the excommunication would be launched from the Genoese colony of Galata across the water.⁴³

Meanwhile Gennadios's followers had discovered an unexpected ally. At the very end of 1451 an envoy from the Hussite church in Prague had arrived in Constantinople. His name was Constantine Platris and he was known as the Englishman. He attracted much attention, partly by his unkempt and dishevelled appearance, but more particularly by his views on the papacy and the Roman church. He was brought to the notice of Gennadios who interviewed him, catechised him, approved of his beliefs and persuaded him to adopt the Orthodox faith. He then invited Platris

⁴² Letter of Pope Nicholas V dated 27 September 1451, ed. G. Hofmann, *Epistolae Pontificiae ad Concilium Florentinum spectantes*, III (*Concilium Florentinum: Documenta et Scriptores*, Series A, I: Rome, 1946), no. 304, pp. 130–8; also ed. Lambros, *PP*, IV, pp. 49–63. *DR*, V, nos. 3532–5. Gill, *Council of Florence*, p. 376.

⁴³ Scholarios, III, pp. 152–65 (12 March 1452).

to address the Synaxis of the anti-unionists in the church near St Sophia where they were wont to congregate. There he made a public profession of his Orthodoxy and condemnation of the pope, the Council of Florence and all the heresies of the Latins. It was music to the ears of his audience. Platris became a popular hero and a timely agent of anti-unionist propaganda. He went back to Prague in January 1452 armed with a document from 'the Holy Orthodox Synaxis in Constantinople' expounding the true faith as well as a letter to the hierarchy in Prague denouncing the pope and the Council of Florence and inviting them to unite with the most holy church of Constantinople. The letter was signed by seven anti-unionist bishops and clerics, among them the humble monk Gennadios. It is worth noting that the special assembly of the Synaxis which Platris addressed had been summoned by the Emperor Constantine; and the reply which came from Prague, in Latin, was addressed to the Emperor Constantine as well as to Gennadios, whom the Hussites evidently believed to be Patriarch. No one could accuse Constantine of failing in his attempts to placate the anti-unionists. Pope Nicholas, with his sterner interpretation of tolerance, may well have thought that the Emperor overdid it.⁴⁴

It was not long before a papal legate to Constantinople was appointed. He was Cardinal Isidore, formerly Bishop of Kiev; but he did not arrive until October 1452. By that time the situation in Constantinople and the threat to its survival as a Christian city of either persuasion had become more critical than ever. The Christians were not alone in deluding themselves that there was little to be feared from the new and immature Sultan Mehmed II. The illusion was shared by the Muslim enemies of the Ottomans in Asia Minor. In the autumn of 1451 some of them rebelled and attempted to regain their independence. Mehmed suppressed the revolt with a speed and force which ought to have shattered the myth of his incompetence. Constantine had yet to learn the lesson. Earlier in the same year he had sent a message to the Sultan with a proposal that seemed calculated to infuriate him. Living in exile in Constantinople there was a grandson of the late Sultan Suleiman

⁴⁴ Documents in A. Salač, *Constantinople et Prague en 1452* (Rospravy Československé Akademie Ved, Ročník 68: Prague, 1958); M. Pavlová, 'L'Empire byzantin et les Tchèques avant la chute de Constantinople', *BS*, 14 (1953), 158-225.

called Orhan. He was the only known male member of the ruling Ottoman house other than Mehmed himself; and Mehmed had agreed to continue paying an annuity for his upkeep. Constantine complained that the annuity was not sufficient. It would have to be doubled; and he imprudently hinted that in the person of Orhan he had a hostage, a pretender to the sultanate, whom he might feel tempted to release. The game had been played before. Constantine's father Manuel II had played it with varying success. But it was risky.

The message was received at Brusa by Mehmed's vizir Halil Pasha, a man who was often inclined to temper his master's belligerence. He was appalled by Constantine's ineptitude and lost his temper with the messengers. 'You stupid Greeks', he shouted,

I have had enough of your devious ways. The late Sultan was a lenient and conscientious friend to you. The present Sultan is not of the same mind. If Constantine eludes his bold and impetuous grasp, it will be only because God continues to overlook your cunning and wicked schemes. You are fools to think that you can frighten us with your fantasies, and that when the ink on our recent treaty is barely dry. We are not children without strength or reason. If you think you can start something, do so. If you want to proclaim Orhan as Sultan in Thrace, go ahead. If you want to bring the Hungarians across the Danube, let them come. If you want to recover the places which you lost long since, try it. But know this: you will make no headway in any of these things. All that you will achieve is to lose what little you still have.

The Sultan's own reply to Constantine's impertinent requests was more laconic. He promised simply to examine them and to act upon them justly and honourably as soon as he returned to his European capital at Adrianople. This he did without delay. He made peace with the rebels in Asia Minor and crossed the Bosphoros in the winter of 1451. He considered that Constantine had broken the terms of their agreement of March 1449. He revoked the small concessions which he had then made. He gave orders for the encirclement of Constantinople to begin. Constantine had fatally misjudged his enemy. Mehmed's father had gone into battle against the Christians at Varna in 1444 with the text of their broken truce nailed to his standard. Mehmed's moral indignation was perhaps less well founded. But what he took to be the perfidy of the Greeks gave him the pretext for concentrating all

his energies and resources on the siege and capture of Constantinople. This had been his ambition since the moment when he came to power. The time had come for its fulfilment.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Doukas, pp. 294–5. S. Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople 1453* (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 65–6; F. Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and his Time* (Princeton, N.J., 1978), p. 72.

4 * THE FALL OF CONSTANTINOPLE

As soon as he got back to Adrianople the Sultan began to plan the construction of a fortress on the European shore of the Bosphoros. Thirty-five years earlier his grandfather Bayezid had built a castle on the Adriatic shore of the straits. It came to be called Anadolu Hisar. Mehmed proposed to build its pair on the opposite side, thereby controlling the sea traffic up and down the Bosphoros and blockading Constantinople by land and sea. In the winter of 1451 he ordered skilled masons and labourers to be gathered from all his provinces and building material to be transported to the site which he had selected, at the narrowest part of the channel. The people of Constantinople feared the worst. They sensed that all the prophecies about the end of their world and the coming of the Antichrist were about to come true. In the spring of 1452 they could see that work on the fortress had begun. All that the Emperor could do was protest. He sent messengers to the Sultan to remind him of their treaty. He pointed out that Mehmed's grandfather had respectfully sought permission from the Emperor Manuel II before building his castle on the Asiatic side of the straits, which was in any case on Ottoman territory. Mehmed was not inclined to explain what he was about nor to be conciliatory. Clearly both sides of the Bosphoros were in Ottoman control. His grandfather had had it in mind to build a fortress on the European shore. He did not live to achieve it. What the Sultan did or proposed to do was none of the Emperor's business.

Constantine's messengers came back to report. It was now obvious that the new fortress was to serve two purposes. It was to guard if not to close the channel to and from the Black Sea in order to starve Constantinople of its food supplies and deprive the Emperor of the customs dues payable by Italian ships plying up and down the Bosphoros. Worse still it was to be the base from which the conquest of Constantinople was to be directed. There was panic in the city. By March 1452 the materials and workmen

were assembled on the chosen site. Construction of the fortress began on 15 April. It was finished in August. It came to be known as the European castle, Rumeli Hisar, across the water from Anadolu Hisar, the castle of the East. The Turks called it Boghaz-Kesen, the Greeks Laimokopia, the cutter of the channel, or of the throat. To clear the site the Turkish workmen demolished some churches and other buildings which stood in their way. In June some of the local Greeks dared to object. They were rounded up and massacred by the Turks. Some Greek farmers at Epibatai on the Sea of Marmora were incensed when the Turks set horses and pack animals to graze on their land and ravage the crops just when harvest time was coming round. The Sultan turned his troops on to the villagers and murdered forty of them. The historian Doukas believed that it was this incident which began the conflict that was to end in 'the destruction of the Romans'. It provoked the Emperor to make a formal declaration of war on the Sultan. He closed the gates of Constantinople and arrested all the Turks inside it. It was a futile gesture and he set them free after three days.¹

The Turkish historian Tursun Beg tells a somewhat similar tale about a scuffle between some shepherds and a group of Turkish soldiers. Those in the city thought that this was the beginning of war and closed the gates. Some of the Sultan's officers who had been sight-seeing found themselves shut in. The Emperor saw that they were well-treated and sent back to their camp with an escort. But the Sultan was angry. He would accept no apologies and sent back a challenge: 'Either surrender the city or prepare for battle.'² The only practical measures that Constantine could now take were to lay in all the provisions that he could find to endure at best a blockade and at worst a siege of his city by land and sea, while looking to the repair and defence of its walls. At the same time he addressed even more urgent appeals to the west for help and support. At the end of 1451, when the Sultan's intentions were clear, he had sent a message to Venice to report that, unless reinforcements were sent at once, Constantinople would fall to the Turks. The Venetians replied in February 1452. They sympathised

¹ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 94; Doukas, pp. 295–303; Kritoboulos, ed. Reinsch, pp. 18–24; Chalkokondyles, II, p. 147. DR, V, no. 3542. Runciman, *Fall of Constantinople*, pp. 65–6; Babinger, *Mehmed*, pp. 75–9.

² *The History of Mehmed the Conqueror by Tursun Beg*, ed. and transl. by H. Inalcik and Rhoads Murphey (Minneapolis–Chicago, 1978), p. 34.

with the Emperor's plight. But they were preoccupied with a war against their neighbours in Lombardy. The best that they could do was to ship to Constantinople the gunpowder and armour which the Emperor had requested. It seemed that the Venetians had lost heart in the rescue of Christian Constantinople. Its conquest was inevitable. They would rather not take the risk of damaging their interests there by interfering with the Sultan's plans.

Their mood changed some months later. The Sultan Mehmed had let it be known that as soon as his fortress of Rumeli Hisar was finished and its guns were in position all ships sailing up and down the Bosphoros would have to stop there and pay a toll. Any that refused would be sunk by gunfire from the walls. In November 1452 a Venetian merchant ship passing that way from the Black Sea ignored a command to heave to. The guns from Rumeli Hisar struck it. Its captain and thirty of his sailors were arrested when they got ashore. All were put to death. The Venetians, who had thought that they were protected by their treaty with the Turks, now found that they too were at war with the Sultan.³

As the months wore on the situation became more and more critical. Constantine sent to the Morea asking for one or other of his brothers to come at once to Constantinople to help him. He hoped that he could now awaken the conscience of the Christian west by alerting its rulers to the fact that a Turkish siege of Constantinople by land and sea was imminent. In his desperation he offered new and extravagant incentives and rewards to any who would bring or send immediate reinforcements. To John Hunyadi, who had suffered a second defeat by the Turks at Kossovo in 1448, he issued an imperial chrysobull promising him either Selymbria or the city of Mesembria on the Black Sea coast. To King Alfonso V of Aragon and Naples he issued another chrysobull offering him the island of Lemnos. He appealed to the Genoese rulers of Chios promising to pay them for their help. He repeated his appeal to Venice; and he sent another ambassador on his rounds, to Ragusa, to various Italian towns, and above all to the pope. His entreaties brought little practical response.⁴ The pope, Nicholas V, was well-

³ Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, pp. 393–5.

⁴ Phrantzes, *Chron. maius*, p. 374. DR, V, nos. 3545–7. R. Guiland, Αἱ πρὸς τὴν Δύσιν ἐκκλήσεις Κωνσταντίνου ΙΑ' τοῦ Δραγάτη πρὸς σωτηρίαν Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, *EEBS*, 22 (1952), 60–74; R. Guiland, 'Les Appels de Constantin XI Paléologue à Rome et à Venise pour sauver Constantinople (1452–1453)', *BS*, 14 (1953), 226–44.

meaning and sympathetic. But he held to a different set of priorities. Like all his predecessors, he believed that the papacy could not go to the rescue of the Christians of the east until they had been seen to repent of their errors and had accepted union with the church of Rome. The order of priorities on either side is well expressed by Edward Gibbon:

The Greeks insisted on three successive measures, a succour, a council, and a final reunion, while the Latins eluded the second, and only promised the first as a consequential and voluntary reward of the third.⁵

On his deathbed in 1455 Nicholas V, with all his cardinals around him, justified himself by saying that he had always intended to do everything in his power to help the Emperor Constantine. But he had known from the start that he alone could never muster the forces needed to oppose the formidable might of the Turks. The Emperor should therefore have approached the other Catholic rulers of the west. The Venetians gave him the same reply. They declared that they would come to the assistance of Constantinople provided that other Christian powers would do the same. It was a dusty answer.⁶

That which Gennadios had feared came true in October 1452. Pope Nicholas, acting on his order of priorities, appointed a legate to sail to Constantinople in May of that year to confirm and to celebrate the union of the churches in a ceremony in the cathedral of St Sophia. He was Cardinal Isidore, formerly Bishop of Kiev, whose devotion to the union of Florence had earned him the reward of being, like Bessarion, created a prince of the Roman church. He went by way of Naples and reached Constantinople on 26 October. With him came Leonardo of Chios, the Genoese Archbishop of Lesbos. Isidore brought with him from Naples a company of 200 archers. So small a body of reinforcements may have been little more than a gesture. But it was a gesture easier for the anxious Greeks to appreciate than the real purpose of Isidore's mission. For he had come to save their souls and not to help them save their city from the Turks.⁷ His arrival in their midst roused the anti-unionists to a frenzy of activity and propaganda. On 1 November their leader Gennadios, who had become passionate in

⁵ E. Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J. B. Bury, VII (London, 1900), p. 97.

⁶ Guiland, 'Les Appels', 237.

⁷ Gill, *Council of Florence*, p. 383; Runciman, *Fall of Constantinople*, p. 69.

his denunciations of the union, withdrew into his monastic cell and nailed a declaration on the door, bearing witness before God that he would sooner die than perjure the Orthodoxy that was his heritage. The union was an evil deed. It portended the ruin of those who had turned their backs on God.⁸ On 13 September 1452, the month before Isidore's arrival, Theodore Agallianos, a lawyer in Constantinople, an erstwhile friend of Mark Eugenikos and a member of the Synaxis, wrote the first draft of a short chronicle of contemporary events. He concluded with the words: 'This was written in the third year of the reign of Constantine Palaiologos, who remains uncrowned because the church has no leader and is indeed in disarray as a result of the turmoil and confusion brought upon it by the falsely named union which his brother and predecessor John Palaiologos engineered... This union was evil and displeasing to God and has instead split the church and scattered its children and destroyed us utterly. Truth to tell, this is the source of all our other misfortunes.'⁹

The Grand Duke Loukas Notaras served his Emperor's purpose by trying to keep tempers cool. He convinced an assembly of the people that the cardinal had come with the best of intentions and that the celebration of the union in Constantinople would be to their advantage. The noblemen of the city were not so readily persuaded and suggested some form of compromise. But the Emperor overruled them. The soldiers that the cardinal had brought with him from Naples were a persuasive factor. They might be the advance guard of more to come. The Orthodox whose consciences were not so finely tuned as those of Gennadios and his followers felt able to pay a spiritual price for material rewards. If and when rescue came and the city was saved from the immediate danger there would be time to think again in a calmer atmosphere. Cardinal Isidore, who was a Byzantine, was well acquainted with the strength of feeling among the Orthodox. When, after the Council of Florence, he had gone back to his see at Kiev as the pope's legate to Russia, his flock had refused to have him and he had been imprisoned. He had learned to be tactful and diplomatic with his opponents; and he had the Emperor behind

⁸ Scholarios, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Petit *et al.*, III, pp. 165–6.

⁹ Theodore Agallianos, ed. Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, II, pp. 635–6. Phrantzes, *Chron. maius*, p. 318, makes the point in very much the same words.

him. George Sphrantzes thought that Constantine should make Isidore Patriarch of Constantinople in place of the absent Gregory III, who was not likely to return. His appointment would gratify the pope and might attract more assistance from the Catholic powers of the west. Constantine, however, wisely saw that it would only stir up further trouble and disturbance.¹⁰

When it became clear that no more western reinforcements were on their way the anti-unionists regained some of their lost ground. There was rioting in the streets. The Latin Archbishop of Lesbos whom Isidore had brought with him told the Emperor that he was being far too lenient. He should arrest their leaders. Like Pope Nicholas V, he thought that Constantine could and should try harder to stifle the opposition. Constantine declined to act on his advice. Instead he summoned the clergy of the Synaxis to meet him in the palace on 15 November and asked them to draft and sign a document stating yet again their objections to the union of Florence. They were glad to do so; and no doubt the Emperor's courteous attention to their point of view did less harm than arresting them and making martyrs of them.¹¹ It is hard to be sure of Constantine's own sincerity in advertising the union of the churches in the heart of the Orthodox Christian world, in the full knowledge that the rest of that world had spurned it. The historian Doukas believed that the Emperor's devotion to the union was no more than a pretence. John Eugenikos had reminded him of the steadfast refusal of his father Manuel II to compromise his Orthodoxy for the sake of saving his empire. But he had the example of his brother John VIII before him; and he may also have recalled how his ancestor Michael VIII in the thirteenth century, in similar circumstances, had resorted to imprisoning and persecuting his opponents when trying to force them to accept union with the Roman church. As a result he had died excommunicated by both churches, condemned as a perfidious bungler by Rome and as a traitor to his faith by Constantinople. Constantine was no great theologian himself; but he was uncommonly patient with those

¹⁰ Phrantzes, *Chron. maius*, pp. 471-2. An anonymous Russian chronicler, writing about 1461-2, blamed 'the accursed Isidore' (of Kiev) for bringing about the fall of Constantinople. A. Pertusi, ed., *La Caduta di Constantinopoli*, II (Verona, 1976), pp. 252-3 (cited as Pertusi, *Caduta*, I, II).

¹¹ Runciman, *Fall of Constantinople*, pp. 70-1; Nicol, *Last Centuries of Byzantium*, pp. 397-9.

who were obsessed with theology. His own obsession was the salvation of his city of Constantinople by whatever means. In this he was loyally supported by his Grand Duke Loukas Notaras. Notaras has gone down in history as a die-hard anti-unionist because of a chance remark attributed to him, that it would be better to see the Sultan's turban in the city than the Latin mitre. Yet he had many friends and contacts among the Latins and had sent some of his children to settle in Italy as evacuees. He may have been provoked to make such an intemperate remark by the intolerance of some of the Italians in Constantinople. But he was of one mind with his Emperor on the matter of defending and saving the Queen of Cities by whatever means available.¹²

Ten days after Constantine's conciliatory meeting with the anti-unionist Synaxis, the guns of Rumeli Hisar sank the Venetian ship in the Bosphoros. The incident concentrated the minds of the people in Constantinople. They were bound together by common fear and panic. The cry for help at almost any price grew louder. On the following day Gennadios issued a manifesto to stiffen the resolve of those who were wavering. But, as he admitted, it was like trying to put out a forest fire.¹³ The noise of Turkish guns firing beyond the city walls was more persuasive than the tirades of Gennadios. His manifesto was in the form of a personal confession to prove the point that he at least stood by the truth of his inherited faith, however many others might betray it in their hour of need. It was rather a smug document. By the end of November 1452 Cardinal Isidore felt that the atmosphere in Constantinople was such that he could at last perform the mission which the pope had entrusted to him. The Emperor agreed; and on 12 December a solemn liturgy was celebrated in the cathedral of the Holy Wisdom. Constantine and his court were present. The names of Pope Nicholas and the Patriarch Gregory were commemorated. The decree of union as recited at Florence was read out. There were different assessments of the size and of the sincerity of the congregation. Isidore maintained that the whole population of Constantinople was there. Doukas believed that most of those present were merely pretending to celebrate an event of which they

¹² On Loukas Notaras, see *PLP*, VIII, no. 20730. His famous remark on the tiara and the turban is recorded by Doukas, p. 329. Doukas, p. 315, expresses his scepticism about Constantine's devotion to the union of Florence.

¹³ Scholarios, III, pp. 171-4, 177.

disapproved. It was perhaps comforting to be in a crowd at such a moment of danger; and some of the congregation felt that whatever manner of union was being proclaimed was no more than provisional, subject to scrutiny and revision when the crisis was over. It is certain that Gennadios was nowhere to be seen among the celebrants. Having published his manifesto he retired from the fray and pledged himself to embarrass his Emperor no further. His time was to come.¹⁴

Constantine had asked for one of his brothers, Thomas or Demetrios, to come from the Morea to swell the ranks of defenders. The Sultan had foreseen this possibility. To keep them where they were, he ordered the elderly Turahan to invade the Morea again in October 1452, taking with him a large army and his sons Umur and Ahmed. The Hexamilion wall was no longer in their way and they plundered all the Peloponnese from Corinth down to Messenia. Only one setback marred their victory. In an encounter with the army of the Despotate, Matthew Asen, one of the officers of Demetrios, captured Turahan's son Ahmed. He was carried away as a prisoner to Mistra. It was a small triumph but an encouraging one. King Alfonso of Aragon, who was all for other people smiting the infidel, wrote to congratulate the Despot Demetrios.¹⁵ Such instances of co-operation between Constantine's brothers in the Morea were lamentably rare. They spent more of their time disputing the boundaries which Constantine had laid down for them when he became Emperor. They also antagonised Venice by encouraging Albanian brigands to raid the lands around the Venetian colonies. When the Turks eventually determined to complete the conquest and occupation of the Morea they found the going all too easy.

There would be no help from members of his own family. Constantine pinned his last hopes on Venice, the pope and Alfonso of Aragon. Even while Turahan and his troops were ravaging the Morea, the senators in Venice were considering the urgent plea of the latest ambassador to come to them from Constantinople. They gave him their reply on 16 November 1452. They insisted that they had already made contingency plans of their own for the protection

¹⁴ Isidore of Kiev, *Letter to Pope Nicholas V* (15 July 1453), ed. Pertusi, *Caduta*, I, p. 92. Doukas, pp. 317–19. Gill, *Council of Florence*, pp. 386–7.

¹⁵ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 96; Chalkokondyles, II, p. 148. Zakythinos, *Despotat*, I, p. 246.

of Constantinople. They urged the Emperor to apply to the pope to organise a coalition of all the western Christian powers; and they promised to use their good offices with Pope Nicholas and with the Venetian cardinals at the Curia to see that immediate action was taken. Their letter was on its way to the Emperor when the incident occurred of the sinking of one of their ships in the Bosphoros. The news took some time to reach Venice. But the Venetians on the spot reacted without waiting for orders from home. For them the danger was palpable. Their baillie in Constantinople, Girolamo Minotto, called an emergency meeting of their council. The Emperor and Cardinal Isidore were there. Most of the leading Venetians in the city voted to stay and share in its defence. Those whose ships were due to sail for home elected to disobey their orders. All agreed that no Venetian ships should leave the harbour without the baillie's permission, on pain of a fine of 3,000 ducats.¹⁶

Reports from their own citizens in Constantinople had more effect on the government of Venice than all the ambassadors that the Emperor had sent. In February 1453 the Doge ordered that warships be prepared and soldiers be recruited to be ready to sail early in April. At the same time he wrote to the pope, to Alfonso of Aragon, to Ladislás of Hungary and to the western Emperor Frederick III, alerting them to the latest news from Constantinople. If no help was sent at once the city would fall into the hands of the infidel. The flurry of diplomatic activity in Venice was impressive, but it came too late. There were intolerable delays in equipping the Venetian armada. The pope, who had already sent three Genoese ships, undertook to provide five more, to be armed at Venice. These too were held up by haggling over the bill for their equipment and the payment of their crews. Meanwhile, the Emperor sent more messengers to Venice and to King Alfonso early in 1453, begging them to send not only arms, soldiers and ships but also food, for the people of Constantinople were beginning to suffer the effect of the Turkish blockade. Alfonso sent a food ship. The Emperor Frederick's only contribution, however, was a wonderfully fatuous letter that he wrote to the Sultan Mehmed threatening him with attack by all the rulers and forces of Christendom if he would not pull down the fortress of Rumeli

¹⁶ Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, pp. 394–6.

Hisar and abandon his plans for the siege of Constantinople. His letter is eloquent of the empty posturings of so many armchair crusaders in the west.¹⁷

The Sultan began his preparations for the siege and capture of Constantinople in the winter of 1452. If his prestige were not to suffer, he had to be certain of success. He therefore planned the operation with great care and with no regard to cost. Throughout that long winter the Emperor Constantine exhorted his people, men and women alike, to work night and day repairing the walls and stacking weapons. He sent ships out to the islands to collect provisions. Memories of the bombardment of the Hexamilion wall were fresh in his mind. His own armoury might not be able to resist the new technology of warfare which the Sultan possessed. If he had such doubts he kept them to himself. Earlier in the year he had been approached by a Hungarian engineer called Urban who offered his services as a designer of heavy artillery. It was he who had constructed the great cannon on the ramparts of Rumeli Hisar. The salary that he demanded was far more than Constantine could afford. Urban went off to the Sultan's camp at Adrianople and sold his skills there for a much higher price. Within a few months it was known that a huge gun was being assembled at the Sultan's foundry. It was to be dragged all the way to the land walls of Constantinople along with a number of smaller cannons.¹⁸

Constantine was anxious but not visibly dismayed. To admit anxiety would be to admit the possibility of defeat, and this he would never do. His courage was infectious and his officers took their cue from him. The Grand Duke Loukas Notaras was given command of the walls along the shore of the Golden Horn. Various sons of the families of Palaiologos and Cantacuzene, whose past disputes had contributed much to the empire's decline, took command of other strategic points in the city. There were many foreigners too who, at the eleventh hour, nobly came to the defence of the city whose wealth they had for so long exploited and undermined. The Venetians were there, most of them by chance more than by design. The Emperor had great faith in them. He asked them to show themselves on the battlements so that the

¹⁷ Guiland, Ἐκκλήσεις, 68–70. DR, V, nos. 3548–9, 3551. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, pp. 397–8. The reply of Frederick III, dated 22 January 1453, is in Jorga, *Notes et Extraits pour servir à l'histoire des Croisades au XV^e siècle*, II (Paris, 1899), pp. 481–2.

¹⁸ Doukas, pp. 307–9, 321.

enemy could see how many they were; and when they offered to stand guard at the four gates in the land walls, he entrusted them with the keys. There were men from Genoa as well, even though the Genoese merchants who lived in their fortified colony at Galata across the Golden Horn had hopes of saving themselves and their property by a show of neutrality. The most famous of the Genoese was Giovanni Giustiniani Longo who arrived at Constantinople as a volunteer in January 1453 bringing a company of 700 troops. He was an experienced professional soldier and renowned for his skill in siege warfare. The Emperor gladly appointed him to take general command of the defence of the walls on the landward side.¹⁹

During the spring of 1453 the Sultan moved his army and its guns down from Adrianople. On Easter Monday, 2 April, his advance guard pitched camp near the land walls of Constantinople. It was against that massive triple line of fortification that he meant to direct his fire. No enemy had ever succeeded in breaking into the city from that side. Three days later the Sultan arrived with the rest of his troops and encamped within firing range of the Gate of St Romanos midway along the length of the walls. The bombardment began almost at once. At the same time the Turkish fleet in the Bosphoros tried to fight its way into the harbour of the Golden Horn. The Emperor had expected this, however, and had had a boom thrown across the entrance. Three days later, under cover of darkness, the boom was temporarily lifted to let in three of the Genoese ships commissioned by the pope and a large cargo vessel loaded with wheat supplied by Alfonso of Aragon. Mehmed knew that he must find a way of getting part of his fleet into the Golden Horn so that he could attack the sea walls. With audacious ingenuity his engineers contrived to build tracks up and over the hill behind Galata from the Bosphoros. On the morning of 23 April the Emperor and his people were horrified to see that about seventy of the smaller Turkish ships had been lowered into the water well behind the protective boom. A Venetian attempt to set fire to them ended in disaster.²⁰

¹⁹ Kritoboulos, ed. Reinsch, p. 40; Phrantzes, *Chron. maius*, p. 386; Doukas, p. 331; Nicolò Barbaro, *Giornale dell' assedio di Costantinopoli 1453*, ed. E. Cornet (Vienna, 1856), p. 35. DR, V, no. 3550. Runciman, *Fall of Constantinople*, pp. 83–4; Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, p. 400.

²⁰ Runciman, *Fall of Constantinople*, pp. 100–8; Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, pp. 400–2.

It was now clear that the number of defenders would never be enough to man the walls along the shore as well as those on the landward side. Food supplies were running short and those who could not afford to pay inflated prices were going hungry. Constantine ordered his officials to collect money from private houses, churches and monasteries to buy food for distribution to the poor. He decreed that church plate should be appropriated and melted down, though he promised to repay its owners four-fold when the emergency was over. The Turks meanwhile kept up a steady bombardment of the outer walls and before long had opened up a breach which exposed a part of the inner defences. As the land walls tumbled before his eyes Constantine began to lose heart. He sent a message to the Sultan begging him to withdraw and make peace, offering him whatever amount of tribute he might ask. Mehmed was too close to victory to turn back. 'Either I shall take this city', he replied, 'or the city will take me, dead or alive. If you will admit defeat and withdraw in peace, I shall give you the Peloponnese and other provinces for your brothers and we shall be friends. If you persist in denying me peaceful entry into the city, I shall force my way in and I shall slay you and all your nobles; and I shall slaughter all the survivors and allow my troops to plunder at will. The city is all I want, even if it is empty.' Constantine did not trouble to reply. For him the idea of abandoning Constantinople was unthinkable.²¹

Some days later a messenger came from the Sultan to advise the people of Constantinople to surrender and save themselves from certain slavery or death. They could stay where they were on payment of a yearly tribute of 100,000 gold coins; or, if they preferred, they could leave their city unharmed and with all their belongings. Constantine consulted his council. Some of his courtiers and clergy implored him to escape while he could. He risked death by staying. If he got away and the city was taken he would live to carry on the struggle and win it back. He could leave for the Morea or some other province and set up an empire in exile. These were not words that he wished to hear. He was so exhausted that he fainted. If the Queen of Cities fell to the Turks it would be by God's will. Constantine Palaiologos would not go down in history as the Emperor who ran away. He would stay and

²¹ Doukas, pp. 345-7.

die with his people. The reply that he gave to the Sultan's messenger was the same. Mehmed could have anything he wanted except for the city of Constantinople. The Emperor would not evacuate it. He would sooner die. It was the last communication between a Byzantine Emperor and an Ottoman Sultan.²²

The only hope left was that the promised fleet from Venice would arrive in time. The hope was dashed when a Venetian ship that had slipped out to reconnoitre came back to report that no fleet was to be seen. Constantine broke down and wept. The whole of Christendom, it seemed, had deserted him in his fight against the enemies of the Cross. He committed himself and his city to the mercy of Christ, His Mother, and the first Christian Emperor, the holy Constantine the Great.²³ The news that they must fight alone unnerved some of his Italian allies. Violence broke out among the Genoese and Venetian defenders. Constantine had to intervene, to remind them that they had a more important conflict on their hands.²⁴ Strange signs and portents added to the tension among the besieged. On 24 May, when the moon was full, there was an eclipse and three hours of darkness. Some recalled the prophecy that Constantinople would be taken when the moon was on the wane. The end seemed to be nigh. Constantine commanded that the most venerable icon of the Mother of God, protectress of the city, should be brought out and carried in procession round the streets. Suddenly the icon slipped off the frame on which it was being held aloft; and almost at once the streets were deluged with torrents of hail and rain. The procession was abandoned. The next day the city was shrouded in thick fog. At nightfall, when the fog lifted, the dome of the church of the Holy Wisdom was seen to be lit by a mysterious glow that crept slowly up from its base to the great gilded cross at the top. The Turks saw it too from their camp beyond the walls. It could only be an omen, of hope for the Turks and of despair for the Greeks.

On Monday, 28 May, the Greeks knew that their moment of truth was upon them. There was a weird calm from the Turkish camp. The Sultan had ordered a day of rest before the final assault. Those in the city who could be spared from manning and patching

²² Doukas, p. 351; Kritoboulos, ed. Reinsch, pp. 41-2; Chalkokondyles, II, pp. 155-7. *DR*, V, no. 3554. Runciman, *Fall of Constantinople*, pp. 123-4; Babinger, *Mehmed*, pp. 89-90.

²³ Barbaro, *Giornale*, p. 35.

²⁴ Phrantzes, *Chron. maius*, p. 402.

up the battered walls took to the streets in prayer. Constantine ordered that icons and relics from churches and monasteries be carried round the walls while the church bells rang. The crowd of Greeks and Italians, Orthodox and Catholic, forgot their differences as they joined in hymns and prayers. Constantine led the procession on its solemn march.²⁵ When it was over he assembled his ministers, officers and soldiers and addressed them. There are three accounts of what he said. The first and shortest of them is contained in a letter of Leonardo of Chios, the Latin Archbishop of Lesbos, addressed to Pope Nicholas V on 19 August 1453. Leonardo had been present during the last weeks of Byzantine Constantinople and he reported to the pope some six weeks after the capture of the city, while his memory was still fresh. The two other and longer versions of Constantine's speech are mainly elaborations and extensions of Leonardo's text. One purports to be from the pen of George Sphrantzes, who must certainly have heard the speech though he makes no mention of it in his memoirs. It is to be read only in the extended version of those memoirs compiled in the sixteenth century by Makarios Melissenos. The third version is given in the Greek Chronicle of the Turkish Sultans, also of the sixteenth century.²⁶ The speech as related by Leonardo of Chios is thus the most reliable account, even though the rhetoric of it may be fanciful. It may therefore be worth giving it in full, since it was Constantine's last public speech and can serve, as Gibbon observed, as 'the funeral oration of the Roman Empire'.²⁷

Gentlemen, illustrious captains of the army, and our most Christian comrades in arms: we now see the hour of battle approaching. I have therefore elected to assemble you here to make it clear that you must stand together with firmer resolution than ever. You have always fought with glory against the enemies of Christ. Now the defence of your fatherland and of the city known the world over, which the infidel and evil Turks have been

²⁵ Runciman, *Fall of Constantinople*, pp. 120–32.

²⁶ Leonardo's *Letter* to Pope Nicholas V on the capture of Constantinople by Mehmed II is in *MPG*, CLIX, cols. 923–44; Constantine's speech is at cols. 938–9; Pertusi, *Caduta*, I, pp. 120–71. There is an English translation by J. R. Melville Jones, *The Siege of Constantinople 1453. Seven Contemporary Accounts* (Amsterdam, 1972), pp. 34–5. Cf. Sphrantzes, *Chron. maius*, pp. 414–22; Χρονικόν τῶν Τούρκων Σουλτάνων, ed. G. T. Zoras (Athens, 1958), pp. 88–9. Zoras, *Περὶ τὴν ἄλωσιν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως* (Athens, 1959), pp. 71–101, is inclined to dismiss even Leonardo's version of the speech as fictitious rhetoric.

²⁷ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. Bury, VII, p. 188.

besieging for two and fifty days, is committed to your lofty spirits. Be not afraid because its walls have been worn down by the enemy's battering. For your strength lies in the protection of God and you must show it with your arms quivering and your swords brandished against the enemy. I know that this undisciplined mob will, as is their custom, rush upon you with loud cries and ceaseless volleys of arrows. These will do you no bodily harm, for I see that you are well covered in armour. They will strike the walls, our breastplates and our shields. So do not imitate the Romans who, when the Carthaginians went into battle against them, allowed their cavalry to be terrified by the fearsome sight and sound of elephants. In this battle you must stand firm and have no fear, no thought of flight, but be inspired to resist with ever more herculean strength. Animals may run away from animals. But you are men, men of stout heart, and you will hold at bay these dumb brutes, thrusting your spears and swords into them, so that they will know that they are fighting not against their own kind but against the masters of animals.

You are aware that the impious and infidel enemy has disturbed the peace unjustly. He has violated the oath and treaty that he made with us; he has slaughtered our farmers at harvest time; he has erected a fortress on the Propontis as it were to devour the Christians; he has encircled Galata under a pretence of peace. Now he threatens to capture the city of Constantine the Great, your fatherland, the place of ready refuge for all Christians, the guardian of all Greeks, and to profane its holy shrines of God by turning them into stables for his horses. Oh my lords, my brothers, my sons, the everlasting honour of Christians is in your hands. You men of Genoa, men of courage and famous for your infinite victories, you who have always protected this city, your mother, in many a conflict with the Turks, show now your prowess and your aggressive spirit toward them with manly vigour. You men of Venice, most valiant heroes, whose swords have many a time made Turkish blood to flow and who in our time have sent so many ships, so many infidel souls to the depths under the command of Loredano, the most excellent captain of our fleet, you who have adorned this city as if it were your own with fine, outstanding men, lift high your spirits now for battle. You, my comrades in arms, obey the commands of your leaders in the knowledge that this is the day of your glory – a day on which, if you shed but a drop of blood, you will win for yourselves crowns of martyrdom and eternal fame.

Constantine's speech, in whatever form he delivered it, gave new heart to those who heard it. When the shades of evening began to fall people moved as if by instinct towards the church of the Holy Wisdom. The soldiers stayed at their posts on the walls. But others, Greeks and Latins alike, crowded into the great church to pray together for their deliverance. Common fear and common danger worked more of a wonder than all the councils of the church. Orthodox bishops, priests and monks who had loudly

protested that they would never again set foot in their cathedral until it had been purged of the Roman pollution, now came to the altar to join their Catholic brethren in the holy liturgy. Among the celebrants was Cardinal Isidore, whom many of the faithful had branded as a traitor and a heretic. The Emperor Constantine came to pray and to ask forgiveness and remission of his sins from every bishop present before receiving communion at the altar. The priest who gave him the sacrament cannot have known that he was administering the last rites to the last Christian Emperor of the Romans. He then went back to his palace at Blachernai to ask forgiveness from his household and bid them farewell before riding into the night to make a final inspection of his soldiers at the wall.

The attack began without warning in the early hours of Tuesday, 29 May. Wave upon wave of the Sultan's front-line troops charged up to the land walls. For nearly two hours they hammered at the weakest section, where the guns had already done their ruinous work. But Giustiniani and his men, helped by Constantine, held them back and they began to withdraw. Their place was at once taken by some of the more professional and better armed and disciplined of the Sultan's soldiers, supported by covering fire from the Turkish artillery. Still the defences held. At the same time the sea wall along the Golden Horn was under heavy attack, though there too the defenders held the initiative. The Sultan's strategy was to give the Christians no respite. Hardly had they recovered from the second assault on the land walls when the janissaries, his crack troops, advanced at the double, fresh and eager. Just before the break of day Giustiniani, who had been holding the line at the critical point for more than six hours, was badly wounded. The Emperor begged him to stay at his post but he was too weak to carry on. His bodyguard carried him down to the harbour and on to a Genoese ship.

When they saw that their commander had left them, Giustiniani's men lost heart. The defence wavered. The janissaries saw their chance. Constantine and his troops fought on with desperation but without much hope after their Genoese allies left them to it. The janissaries gained control of the outer wall and then scaled the inner wall as well. Meanwhile a band of about fifty Turks broke in through a little gate in the wall called Kerkopoporta. They were the first of the Sultan's army to enter the city. They

mounted the tower above the gate and raised the Ottoman flag. Their comrades understood the signal and echoed the shouts from within that the city had been taken. They stormed in through the breaches that the guns had made in the walls. The defenders began to panic when they saw themselves surrounded with no way of escape. The Emperor did all that he could to rally them. At the end the fighting had become hand to hand. It was fiercest at the gate called St Romanos where the inner wall had been breached; and it was probably there that Constantine Palaiologos was last seen alive. He had thrown away his regalia. He was killed fighting as a common soldier to stem the flood of infidels pouring into his Christian city.²⁸ The most eloquent epitaph for him is that of the historian Kritoboulos:

The Emperor Constantine ... died fighting. He was a wise and moderate man in his private life and diligent to the highest degree in prudence and virtue, sagacious as the most disciplined of men. In political affairs and in matters of government he yielded to no one of the Emperors before him in pre-eminence. Quick to perceive his duty, and quicker still to do it, he was eloquent in speech, clever in thought, and very accomplished in public speaking. He was exact in his judgements of the present, as someone said of Pericles, and usually correct in regard to the future – a splendid worker, who chose to do and to suffer everything for his fatherland and for his subjects.²⁹

Later Greek historians were convinced that Constantine died as a hero and a martyr. Their conviction has never been questioned in the Greek-speaking world. His tragic reign lasted for only four years, four months and twenty-four days. In that short time he acted as an emperor should. Only some western sources suggest that he ever shirked his duty. Of his dignity, courage and strength of character there can be no doubt. Of his physical appearance, on the other hand, we know almost nothing. One of the duties of an emperor was to set his seal on documents of state, often bearing his own effigy. Constantine issued several such documents; but only two of his seals survive. The grander of the two is that once appended to the golden bull which he sent to the Commune of Ragusa in June 1451 and is now in Dubrovnik.³⁰ The other was set

²⁸ Runciman, *Fall of Constantinople*, pp. 133–44. On the Gate of St Romanos, see R. Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, 2nd edn (Paris, 1964), p. 280.

²⁹ Kritoboulos, ed. Reinsch, pp. 80–2; translated by C. T. Riggs, *History of Mehmed the Conqueror by Kritovoulos* (Princeton, N.J., 1954), p. 81.

³⁰ F. Dölger, *Facsimiles byzantinischer Kaiserurkunden* (Munich, 1931), no. 67, Tafel XIV (the manuscript), and XXV (the seal).

on a letter which he wrote to the Marquis of Ferrara, Borso d'Este, on the occasion of the mission of Andronikos Leontaris to Pope Nicholas V in April of the same year.³¹ Both seals bear Constantine's portrait as Emperor on one side and the figure of Christ on the other. They depict him in his late forties, for he never attained his fiftieth year. They are, however, stylised and far from realistic. Like most of their kind they display the symbol rather than the person of imperial majesty. Both show a bearded Emperor standing with the Cross in his right hand and a book or scroll in his left. Each is inscribed, with minor variations, with the name of Constantine Palaiologos in Christ Autokrator; and in each he wears an imperial crown, a fact which seems to emphasise the symbolism, since he was never officially crowned.

Another duty of an Emperor was to mint coins bearing his own effigy. It was customary for such coins to be distributed at his coronation ceremony. Constantine never had the chance to do so. But he certainly issued some coins of his own, however limited in quantity. Two witnesses of the siege of Constantinople, Nicolò Barbaro and Leonardo of Chios, testify that in the months of crisis Constantine ordered sacred vessels to be removed from churches and melted down to produce coins to pay his soldiers, sappers and masons working on the repair of the walls.³² There is no knowing how many were minted and they would have been easy booty for the Turks to gather after the conquest. This may account for the rarity of the known coins of Constantine today. Indeed it was thought that none existed until 1974, when one small and battered silver piece was identified as belonging to his reign. It shows a crude bust of an emperor bearded, crowned and nimbate; and it bears the legend: 'Const(antine) Pal(aiologos)'. The obverse shows the bust of Christ. Its denomination is that of a quarter-*hyperpyron*, or a quarter of the once universal gold coin of the Byzantine Empire. By the fifteenth century the *hyperpyron* was no longer being minted, having been replaced by the large silver coin equivalent to half its value and known as the *stavraton*. In recent years several other silver coins of Constantine XI have come to

³¹ Dölger, *Facsimiles*, no. 58 (Latin text), Tafel XXII (the manuscript). See also Sp. P. Lambros, *Σφραγίδες τῶν τελευταίων Παλαιολόγων*, NE, I (1904), 416–32, fig. 2. Zakythinos, *Despotat*, I, p. 240 n. 8.

³² Leonardo Chiensis, ed. Pertusi, *Caduta*, I, pp. 146–7; Barbaro, *Giornale*, ed. Cornet, p. 66 (additional note by Marco Barbaro).

light, notably in a hoard of 154 late Palaiologan pieces of which no less than 86 are from his reign. They represent the three denominations of the *stavraton*, the half-*stavraton* and the one-eighth *stavraton*. They depict the bust of the Emperor bearded and crowned; and the legend on the *stavrata*, though not always fully discernible, reads: 'Constantine Despot Palaiologos by the grace of God Emperor of the Romans'.³³ His title is exact, but his image remains muddy and indistinct. Their rarity may give them an inflated value in modern terms. But they are miserably eloquent advertisements for the collapse of a civilisation that had once been supported by an advanced monetary economy.

A fifteenth-century manuscript of the Byzantine Chronicle of Zonaras now in the Biblioteca Estense in Modena is adorned with miniature portrait heads of all the Byzantine Emperors from the first to the last Constantine and, for good measure, of the father of Constantine the Great, Constantius Chlorus. Constantine Palaiologos is here designated as the brother of the Emperor John VIII, who is represented next to him. All the portraits in this imperial gallery are more or less fictitious and stylised. It may be, however, that the artist had some contemporary representations before him for the last of them. That of John VIII bears some resemblance to other known portraits of him that were painted when he was in Italy. That of Constantine XI may have been based on his seal which is still in Modena. At all events, he is shown as a round-faced man with a beard shorter than that of his brother John and very much less florid than that of his father Manuel II.³⁴

Later attempts to portray the last Byzantine Emperor range from the fantastic to the ludicrous.³⁵ A special word of praise for post-Byzantine inventiveness should, however, be given to the

³³ ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΣ ΔΕΣΠΟΤΗΣ ΟΥ ΠΑΛΑΙΟΛΟΓΟΥ
ΘΥΧΑΡΙΤΙΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΡΟΜΕΩΝ.

I am particularly indebted to Mr Simon Bendall for allowing me to see the text and illustrations of his study of the new hoard of Palaiologan coinage which will be published in the *Revue Numismatique*. On the other known coins of Constantine XI, see D. R. Sear, *Byzantine Coins and their Values* (London, 1974), p. 410, no. 2260; S. Bendall and P. J. Donald, *The Later Palaeologan Coinage* (London, 1979), p. 176. *Antike Münzen*. Auktion 50 am 25. April 1990, Zürich, p. 80, Lots nos. 423-5.

³⁴ Biblioteca Estense, Modena, Cod. a. S. 5, 5 (= Gr. 122), f. 294^v; reproduced in Lambros, *NE*, I, 239-40 and plate IV, no. 3; Lambros, *Λεύκωμα Βυζαντινῶν Αὐτοκρατόρων* (Athens, 1930), plate 91; Barker, *Manuel II*, p. 387.

³⁵ See Sp. P. Lambros, *Αἱ εἰκόνες Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ Παλαιολόγου*, *NE*, 3 (1906), 229-42; *Νεαὶ εἰκόνες Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ Παλαιολόγου*, *NE*, 4 (1907), 238-40.

sixteenth-century Cretan icon-painter George Klontzas (c. 1540–1608). In 1590 Klontzas compiled what he called a Chronicle (*Chronographia*) illustrated with 410 miniatures. It is a strange concoction of fact and fiction, history and myth; and many of the illustrations show scenes from the visions and oracular pronouncements of the Prophet Daniel, Leo the Wise and Methodios of Patara.³⁶ The manuscript is in Venice.³⁷ It contains four fanciful portraits of Constantine Palaiologos. One of them is a striking portrayal of the Emperor with his mother Helena alongside the first Constantine and Helena. Another shows the Emperor sitting on his throne in deep melancholy with the figure of death standing over him; another shows him lying in his tomb with his sword beside him, looking more like a western crusader than a Byzantine Emperor.³⁸

These are flights of fancy and imagination, not portraits. They belong to the corpus of post-Byzantine myths and legends about the last Emperor of the Romans. For Constantine Palaiologos was more celebrated after his death than ever he had been during his short and unhappy reign.

³⁶ For the oracles and prophecies, see below pp. 100–8.

³⁷ Marcianus Cod. CL. VII. no. 22 (= 1466). A. D. Paliouras, 'Ο ζωγράφος Γεώργιος Κλόντζας (1540–1608) καὶ αἱ μικρογραφίαι τοῦ Κώδικος αὐτοῦ (Athens, 1977).

³⁸ Paliouras, plates 180, 183, 189, 190, pp. 217–19.

5 * THE DEATH OF CONSTANTINE

The fall of Constantinople and the death of its Emperor were very soon interpreted as the fulfilment of prophecies of one kind or another. The monk Gennadios, who had caused the Emperor so much trouble, and whose name was not mentioned in dispatches during the defence of the city, was taken prisoner with his fellow monks and sold into slavery by the Turks. The Sultan Mehmed was well briefed about the religious dissension among the now defeated Orthodox Christians. He knew that many of them openly attributed their defeat to the union of Florence; and he knew that the unionist Patriarch Gregory III had abandoned if he had not forfeited his office. In his capacity as successor to the Christian Roman Emperor in Constantinople the Sultan felt bound to appoint a new Patriarch, who would be answerable to him for the conduct of all Christians in his dominions. His choice fell on George Scholarios, the monk Gennadios. He was generally respected by the Orthodox and particularly acceptable to the Sultan as one who could be relied upon to denounce any moves that the western Christians might make to upset the course of history. A search was made and Gennadios was found and brought to Constantinople where the Sultan invested him as Patriarch with all the traditional ceremony proper to the occasion, in January 1454.¹

Gennadios left no detailed account of the Turkish conquest of his city and the death of its Emperor Constantine. But he compiled a series of chronological observations on the ways in which the hand of providence could be seen to have influenced the dreadful events of his lifetime. He noted that the Christian Empire of the Romans had originated with the Emperor Constantine and his mother Helena and had come to its end when another Constantine, son of Helena, was Emperor and was killed in the conquest of his city. Between the first and the last Constantine there had been no

¹ Runciman, *Fall of Constantinople*, pp. 154-7.

Emperor of the same name whose mother was a Helena. He observed that the first Patriarch of Constantinople under Constantine I was Metrophanes and the last Patriarch was also called Metrophanes, who died in 1443; for his successor, the Patriarch Gregory III, whom Gennadios never recognised, went off to Rome and died there. There was no other Patriarch with the name of Metrophanes between the first and last. Gennadios also noted that the city of Constantinople had been founded on 11 May (330), finished on another 3 May and captured on 29 May (1453), so that all the events of its birth and death occurred in the month of May. Finally, he recorded the prophecy that when an Emperor and a Patriarch whose names began with the letters Jo- reigned at the same time, then the end of the Empire and of the church would be at hand. So it had come about. For the men who brought ruin on the church in Italy (at the Council of Florence) were Joannes the Emperor and Joseph the Patriarch. Gennadios was an accomplished scholar but he retained a naive faith in prophecies. It had long been foretold that the world would end with the Second Coming of Christ which, on Byzantine calculation, was scheduled to happen in the 7000th year after the creation of the world (in 5509–08 BC), or in AD 1492. He took some comfort therefore from the belief that, in 1453, there was not long to go.²

Gennadios jotted down his chronological notes some time after the death of the Patriarch Gregory III in 1459. He was thus not the first to remark on the coincidence of names between the first and the last Constantine and Helena. The Venetian surgeon, Nicolò Barbaro, in his Diary of the siege of Constantinople, notes that God decided that the city should fall when it did in order that the ancient prophecies should be fulfilled, one of which was that Constantinople should be lost to the Christians during the reign of an Emperor called Constantine son of Helena.³ Cardinal Isidore, who managed to escape from the ruins of the city disguised as a beggar, reported it as a fact rather than a prophecy in a letter which he wrote to Pope Nicholas V on 6 July 1453: 'Just as the city was founded by Constantine, son of Helena, so it is now tragically

² Scholarios, *Œuvres complètes*, IV, pp. 510–12. A. Pertusi, *Fine di Bisanzio e fine del mondo* (Rome, 1988), pp. 60–1; D. M. Nicol, *Church and Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 104–5.

³ Barbaro, *Giornale*, ed. Cornet, p. 61; ed. Pertusi, *Caduta*, I, pp. 29–30.

lost by another Constantine, son of Helena.’⁴ Kritoboulos of Imbros, one of the principal historians of the event, wondered at the coincidence of names in the city’s long history: ‘For Constantine, the fortunate Emperor, son of Helena, built it and raised it to the heights of happiness and prosperity; while under the unfortunate Emperor Constantine, son of Helena, it has been captured and reduced to the depths of servitude and misfortune.’⁵ The coincidence was remarked upon by several of the writers of the so-called Short Chronicles and by the author of at least one of many laments on the fall of Constantinople.⁶ Unless God ordained that it should be so, as Barbaro believed, it is a fortuitous if melancholy juxtaposition of names of the kind beloved by pedantic antiquarians. But it answers none of the questions concerning the fate of the last Emperor Constantine.

The Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453 was an event that shocked the Christian world. It was widely reported at the time and lamented for many years afterwards. The reports were embellished and the tale grew with the telling. Laments and dirges became a new Greek literary genre and added legends to the facts. Even the more sober and nearly contemporary reports, however, in Greek, Latin, Turkish, Slavonic and other European languages, are at variance as to the fate of the Emperor Constantine. Some make no mention of his death. Others record simply that he was killed in the fighting. A few have it that he escaped.⁷ The man most likely to have known the facts was George Sphrantzes, Constantine’s lifelong friend, who was there at the time on 29 May 1453. But, as he says in his memoirs, he was not at the Emperor’s side, for he was obeying orders to inspect the defences in another part of the city. All that he could truthfully say was that his master was killed, or rather martyred, during the conquest of the city.⁸ The earliest eye-witnesses of the conquest, though not of the Emperor’s death, express a general uncertainty about his fate. The Archbishop Leonardo of Chios, who was taken prisoner but managed to get away, wrote his account to the pope on 16 August 1453. He reports

⁴ Isidore of Kiev, ed. Pertusi, *Caduta*, I, p. 60.

⁵ Kritoboulos, ed. Reinsch, p. 80.

⁶ Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, I, 52/4, p. 370; II 5/1, p. 684. *Anonymi Monodia de capta Constantinopoli*, ed. A. Pertusi, *Testi inediti e poco noti sulla caduta di Constantinopoli*, ed. A. Carile (Bologna, 1983), p. 326 (cited hereafter as Pertusi–Carile, *Testi*).

⁷ The sources are conveniently collected in Pertusi, *Caduta*, I, II and Pertusi–Carile, *Testi*.

⁸ Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, pp. 96–8. Sphrantzes was taken prisoner and, after some months of slavery, was ransomed on 1 September and left Constantinople for Mistra.

that once the valiant Genoese captain Giustiniani had been wounded and forced to withdraw in the fight, Constantine's courage failed. He begged one of his young officers to run him through with his sword so that he would not be captured alive. No one was brave enough; and as the Turks came pouring in through the walls he was caught up in the *mêlée* and fell. He got up, only to fall again, and he was trampled underfoot.⁹

The Venetian Nicolò Barbaro, who also escaped, wrote in his Diary that nobody really knew whether the Emperor was alive or dead. Some said that his body had been seen among the corpses and it was rumoured that he had hanged himself at the moment when the Turks broke through the Gate of St Romanos. A marginal note in the text of Barbaro's Diary repeats the statement of Leonardo, that Constantine begged in vain to be put to the sword. He then fell in the crush, rose again, fell once more, and so died.¹⁰ Cardinal Isidore wrote from Crete to his colleague Bessarion on 6 July 1453 and reported that Constantine had been wounded and killed fighting at the Gate of St Romanos before the final battle. But he added a new detail to the story: he had heard that the Emperor's head had been severed and presented as a gift to the Sultan, who was delighted to see it, subjected it to insults and injuries and carried it off in triumph as a trophy when he went back to Adrianople. This gruesome detail was evidently circulated among western survivors of the fall from an early date. It was to be taken up and elaborated by the Byzantine historians Doukas and Chalkokondyles in later years. A Florentine merchant called Jacopo Tedaldi, who had taken part in the defence of the city and escaped on a Venetian ship just after the conquest, reported the sad fact that the Emperor had been killed and added: 'Some say that his head was cut off; others that he perished in the crush at the gate. Both stories may well be true.' In the letter that he wrote to Pope Nicholas V on the same day as his letter to Bessarion, Cardinal Isidore says nothing of the Emperor's execution, noting only that the soul of Constantine, the last of the Roman Emperors, had been crowned with unexpected martyrdom and had gone to heaven. Perhaps Isidore too was uncertain of the truth.¹¹

⁹ Leonardo Chiensis, *Letter to Pope Nicholas V*, ed. Pertusi, *Caduta*, I, pp. 162-4.

¹⁰ Barbaro, *Giornale*, ed. Pertusi, *Caduta*, I, p. 35.

¹¹ Jacopo Tedaldi, ed. Pertusi, *Caduta*, I, pp. 60, 74-5.

The uncertainty is reflected in other contemporary accounts. One who was in Constantinople at the time was Benvenuto, Consul of the Anconitans in the city. He had heard from a soldier that the Emperor had been killed and that his severed head, fixed on a lance, had been presented to the Lord of the Turks. The Franciscans in Constantinople, writing to Bologna about the end of November, reported simply that the Emperor was among the dead.¹² So also did the Knights of St John at Rhodes, in a letter to the Margrave of Brandenburg at Jerusalem written on 30 June; and a pilgrim from Basle in 1453 heard the news of the conquest of Constantinople and the death of the Emperor while he was on his voyage. A lawyer from Padua, Paolo Dotti, writing from Crete in June, reported the same sad news.¹³ An account by two Greek noblemen who had been in Constantinople at the time and written not long after the event has been preserved in a German version. They reported that, when Giustiniani was wounded and left his post, the Emperor cried out to God that he had been betrayed and he was killed in the crowd.¹⁴ The Grand Master of the Knights of Rhodes, however, wrote to the Prior of his Order in Germany as early as 6 July 1453, reporting the rumour that the Emperor's body, discovered among the heaps of corpses, had been decapitated.¹⁵

Cardinal Isidore may not have cared to worry Pope Nicholas with unsubstantiated rumours about the mutilation of the martyred Emperor's corpse. Aeneas Sylvius, then Bishop of Siena and later to become Pope Pius II, was not so circumspect. He was to be a fervent champion of the Christian cause in the east when it was too late; and he was prepared to believe the worst of the infidel Turks. In a letter to the pope on 12 July, Aeneas wrote that he had it from refugees or deserters in Serbia that the Emperor Constantine Palaiologos had been decapitated and that his son had escaped and was besieged in Galata. He reported the same to Nicholas of Cusa a month later.¹⁶ His account is false in at least

¹² Pertusi-Carile, *Testi*, pp. 4, 25.

¹³ Pertusi, *Caduta*, II, p. 56; Pertusi-Carile, *Testi*, pp. 51, 54.

¹⁴ Thomas Eparchos and Joshua Diplovatatzes (?), *Account of the capture of Constantinople*, ed. Pertusi, *Caduta*, I, p. 237.

¹⁵ John de Lastic, ed. N. Jorga, *Notes et Extraits*, II, p. 520.

¹⁶ Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, ed. Pertusi, *Caduta*, II, pp. 44, 50-2.

one respect, for Constantine had no son. But the fact that his informants were Serbian may mean that they were better acquainted with the Turkish version of events. For the Serbians formed the contingent of 150 cavalymen which the Despot George Branković had been obliged to send to Constantinople as the Sultan's vassal.¹⁷ They had fought alongside the Turkish soldiers and those that got back to Serbia will have picked up a version more Turkish than Greek. Certainly all the earliest surviving Turkish accounts of the fall of Constantinople record that the Emperor's head was severed.

One of the Serbian contingent left his own account. He was Constantine Mihailović of Ostrovica who later converted to Islam and may have become a janissary in the Sultan's service. His memoirs are sometimes wrongly known as the *Diary of a Polish Janissary*. He did not commit them to writing until forty years after the fall, when he was living in Poland, and his account has its fanciful moments. But it may well be accurate in the matter of the Emperor's death. He had it that Constantine was killed fighting at the breach in the wall. His head was hacked off by a janissary called Sarielles, who took it to his Sultan and threw it at his feet saying that it was the head of his bitterest enemy. Mehmed asked one of his prisoners, a close friend of the Emperor, whose head it was; and he confirmed that it was indeed that of the Emperor (Constantine) Dragaš. The Sultan then handsomely rewarded the janissary and granted him the province of Aydin and Anatolia.¹⁸ The janissary's name may be fictitious. The amount of his reward is surely exaggerated. But the rest of the story may well be true; and it is repeated in Turkish accounts, though some of them present a different version of the spot where Constantine met his death.

Tursun Beg, who was in the Sultan's army in 1453, later wrote a *History of the Lord of the Conquest, the Sultan Mehmed*. He presents the Emperor's conduct in his last hours in a less heroic and favourable manner. He describes how Constantine 'the

¹⁷ On the Serbian contingent, see Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 102. Cf Pertusi, *Caduta*, I, p. xl.

¹⁸ Constantine Mihailović, ed. Pertusi, *Caduta*, I, p. 259. I. Dujčev, 'La Conquête turque et la prise de Constantinople dans la littérature slave de l'époque', in *Medioevo bizantino-slavo*, III (Rome, 1971), pp. 478-87.

infidel' and his men panicked and fled, taking the road to the sea on the chance of finding a ship on which to escape. They came across a band of Turkish marines who had changed into the uniform of janissaries to join in the plunder and were lost in the back streets of the city. The Emperor, who was on horseback, charged at one of them and felled him. The Turk, though half dead, hit back and cut off the Emperor's head. His companions were captured or killed, their horses were rounded up and the Turkish marines were amply compensated for having missed the plunder of the city by the wealth of gold, silver and jewels which they found on the Christian corpses.¹⁹ The later Turkish account by Ibn Kemal is close to that of Tursun Beg but adds some interesting details. He relates that the Emperor and his suite, having abandoned the fight, were making for Yedi Kule, the Castle of the Seven Towers. Near the Golden Gate they encountered a group of warriors, one of whom, a giant of a man, struck the Emperor down and sliced off his head without realising who he was.²⁰ The other surviving Turkish accounts are strangely disappointing. Mehmed Neshri, writing about 1492, notes only that the Emperor was decapitated. Ashik Pasha-Zade at about the same time records only that he was killed; while Khodja Sa'ad Ed-Din, who died in 1599, in his *Diadem of Histories*, follows closely the version of Tursun Beg, though with rather more bloodshed, violence and poetic licence.²¹

A report on the fall of the city written by one Niccolò Tignosi da Foligno before November 1453 relates how the Emperor, who was called 'Dragaš', was seen to be captured by an Ottoman who cut off his head.²² This detail was elaborated by the Venetian Filippo da Rimini in a letter to Francesco Barbaro, procurator of St Mark's, written from Corfu at the end of the year or early in 1454. In a very tendentious, rhetorical and pro-Venetian account, Filippo records that the Emperor's head was found and taken to the Sultan who, moved by the grisly spectacle, said to those around

¹⁹ Tursun Beg, *The History of Mehmed the Conqueror*, ed. and transl. H. Inalcik and R. Murphey (Minneapolis-Chicago, 1978), pp. 36-7; ed. Pertusi, *Caduta*, I, pp. 324-6 (Italian translation).

²⁰ Ibn Kemal, ed. Pertusi, *Caduta*, I, pp. 463-5 (= note 59) (Italian translation).

²¹ Mehmed Neshri, ed. Pertusi, *Caduta*, II, p. 265; Ashik Pasha-Zade, ed. Pertusi-Carile, *Testi*, p. 241 (Italian translation); Sa'ad Ed-Din, translated by E. J. W. Gibb, *The Capture of Constantinople* (Glasgow, 1879), p. 31; Pertusi, *Caduta*, II, pp. 287-8 (Italian translation).

²² Pertusi-Carile, *Testi*, p. 118.

him: 'This was all I lacked to demonstrate the glory that we have won.' This incident is repeated verbatim in the highly derivative account by Giacomo Langhusci inserted in the Chronicle of the Venetian Zorzi Dolfin, which is no earlier than April 1454.²³ A German version written by Heinrich de Soemern, who was probably an official at the papal Curia, had it that three heads on three lances were brought for the Sultan's inspection. One was of the Emperor, one of a Turk who had fought with the Christians and the third was of an old and bearded monk, which they said belonged to Cardinal Isidore, though this at least was false, since Isidore had escaped.²⁴

The Sultan clearly wanted to be sure that the Emperor Constantine was either dead or a captive, for if he had escaped he might, as some of his courtiers had proposed, live to fight another day and stir up the sympathy of western Christendom to greater effect. The point is made in one of the more literary narrations of the events, written not long after they happened. Nicola Sagundino, or Secundinus, was a Venetian from Negroponte (Euboea). He had been taken prisoner by the Turks when they captured Thessalonica in 1430. He served as an interpreter at the Council of Ferrara–Florence and was later sent on various diplomatic missions for the Republic of Venice. On 25 January 1454 he delivered an oration to King Alfonso V of Aragon at Naples. In it he made special mention of the fate of the Emperor Constantine because, as he said, it deserved to be recorded and remembered for all time. In the last hours of the defence of Constantinople the Genoese commander Giustiniani Longo was twice wounded. He told the Emperor that all was lost and that he should retreat. A passage to safety by ship could be found for him. Constantine would have none of it and reproved Giustiniani for his cowardice. For if his Empire fell he could no longer live. He would prefer to die with it. He went to where the enemy appeared to be thickest, to find that they had already occupied a breach in the wall. To be captured alive would be unworthy of a Christian prince. He asked some of his few companions to do him the favour

²³ Pertusi–Carile, *Testi*, pp. 141, 176. Dolfin's account is partially translated by J. R. Melville Jones, *The Siege of Constantinople 1453* (Amsterdam, 1972), pp. 125–30.

²⁴ Pertusi, *Caduta*, II, p. 86.

of killing him. None of them was bold enough. The Emperor therefore cast aside his regalia so that the Turks would not recognise him and, no more distinguishable than a private soldier, charged into the fray with drawn sword in hand. He was struck down by a Turk and fell dead in the ruins of his city and his empire, 'a prince worthy of immortality'. After the conquest the Sultan, who wanted the Emperor as a prisoner, was told it was too late. He ordered a search to be made for the body. It was found in the piles of corpses and rubble and the Sultan commanded that its head be severed, stuck on a stake and paraded around the camp. Later he instructed ambassadors to take the head, along with forty youths and twenty maidens chosen from the booty, to the Sultan of Egypt.²⁵

Similar accounts are given by other fifteenth-century writers. Ubertino Pusculo from Brescia was in Constantinople as a scholar studying Greek in 1453. He was held as a prisoner by the Turks until a Florentine merchant paid his ransom. He was then captured by pirates who took him to Rhodes. Finally, by way of Crete, he got to Rome; and there, about 1455–7, he wrote a poem about the fall of Constantinople. It is a prolix and laboured composition in Latin hexameters. Pusculo's story is that the Emperor Constantine, exhausted by hours of fighting, had snatched some sleep. He was awakened by the clamour around him and went out from his tent sword in hand. He killed three of the janissaries before he was laid low by one of them who severed his head from its shoulders with a great sword, took it to the Sultan and was richly rewarded for his pains.²⁶ A Polish historian, Jan Długosz, writing in Latin before 1480, tells how the Emperor Constantine was decapitated while fighting for his country. His head was fixed on a lance and paraded as an exhibit before being presented to the Sultan.²⁷

The evidence that Constantine was killed in the fighting is almost unanimous and it seems very probable that his corpse was found and decapitated. Only three sources claim that he escaped from the city. Samile, or Samuel, a Greek bishop who had been captured by the Turks, paid his ransom and fled to Transylvania, wrote to the Burgomeister of Hermanstat (Sibiu) on 6 August 1453.

²⁵ Sagundino, ed. Pertusi, *Caduta*, II, pp. 134–6.

²⁶ *Ubertini Pasculi Brixiensis Constantinopoleos Libri IV*, ed. A. Ellissen, *Analekten der mittel- und neugriechischen Literatur*, III, Anhang (Leipzig, 1857), p. 81.

²⁷ Jan Długosz, *Historiae Polonicae*, lib. XII, ed. Pertusi–Carile, *Testi*, p. 234.

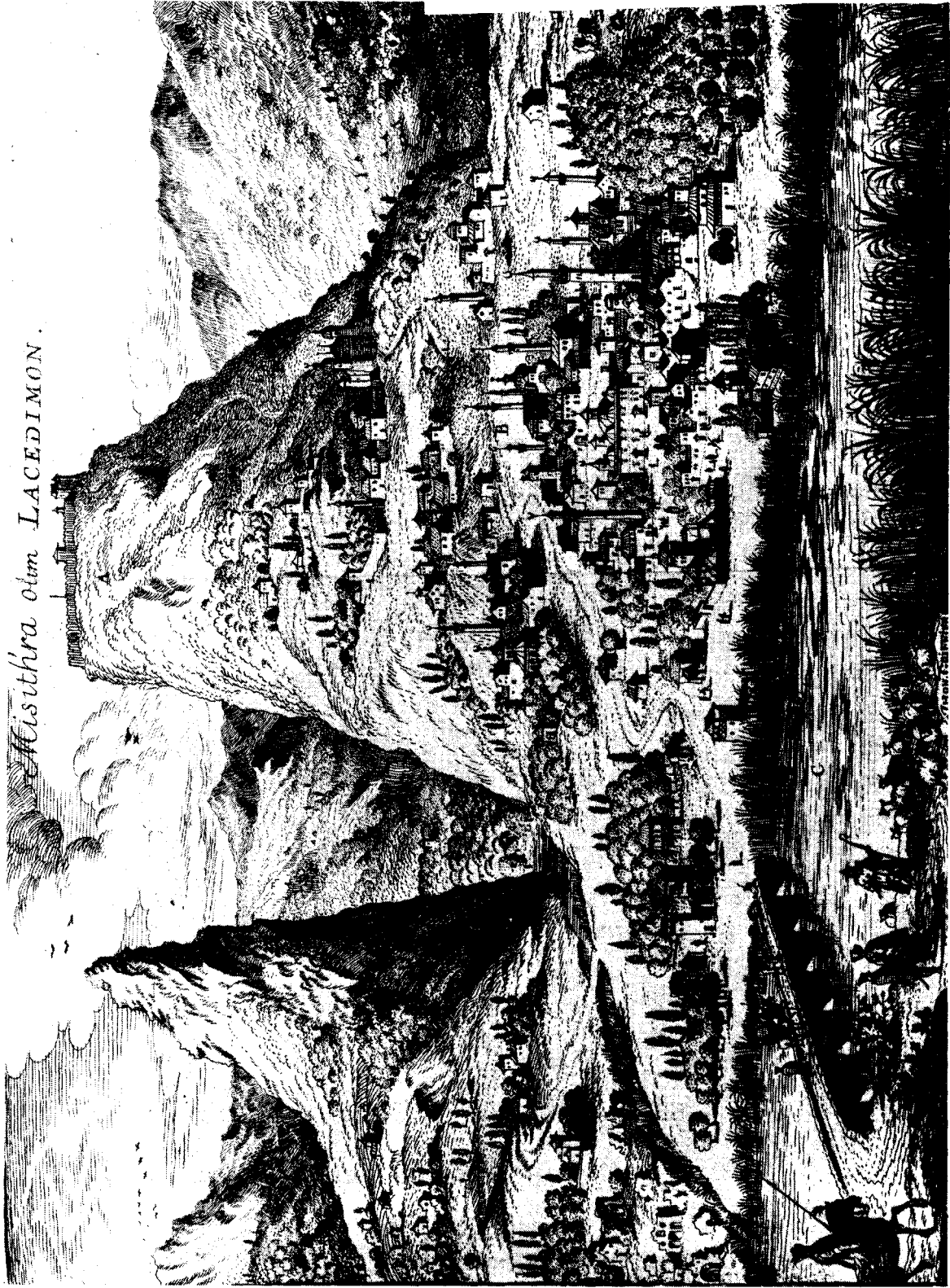


Plate 1 Mistra in the seventeenth century

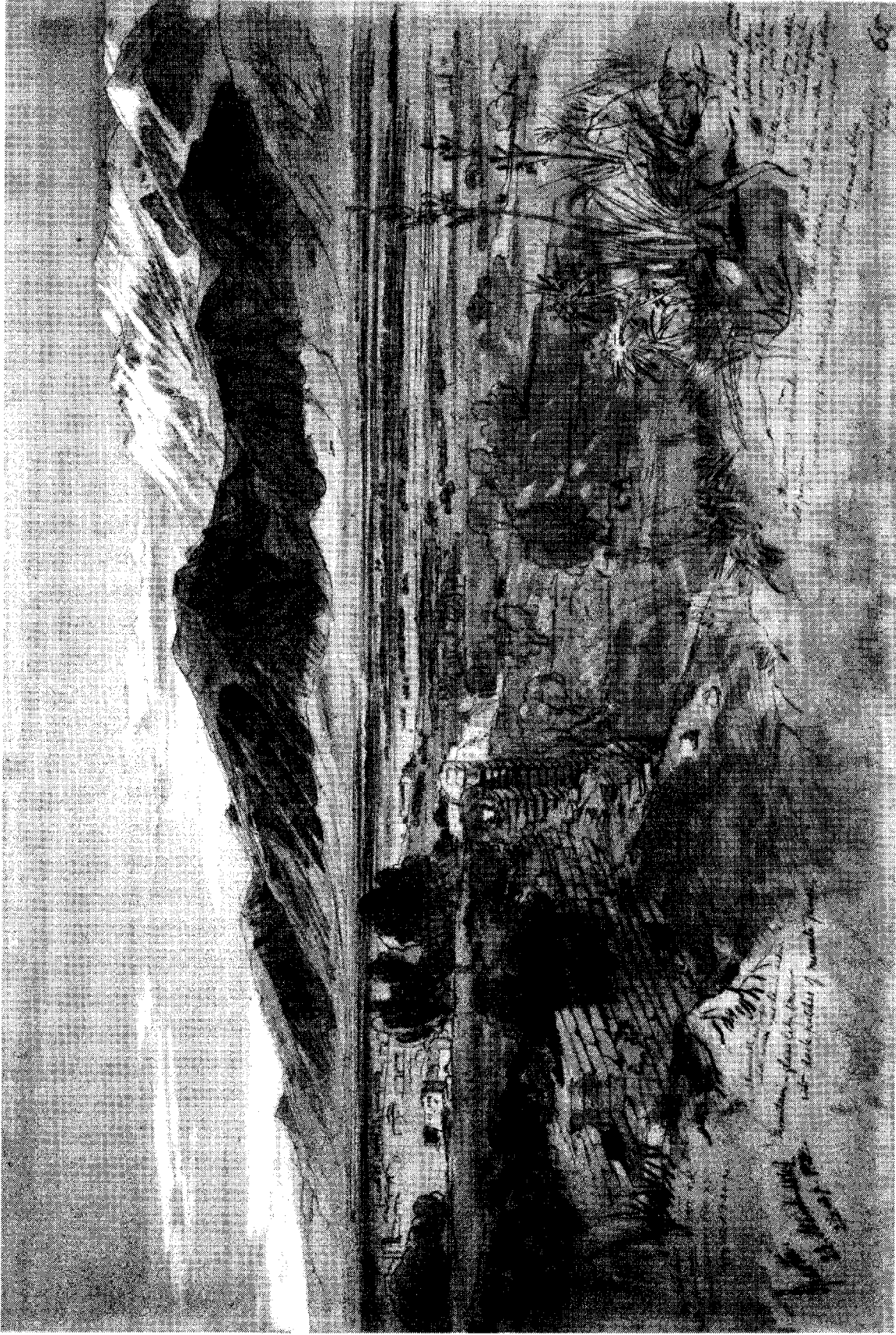


Plate 2 Sparta by Edward Lear

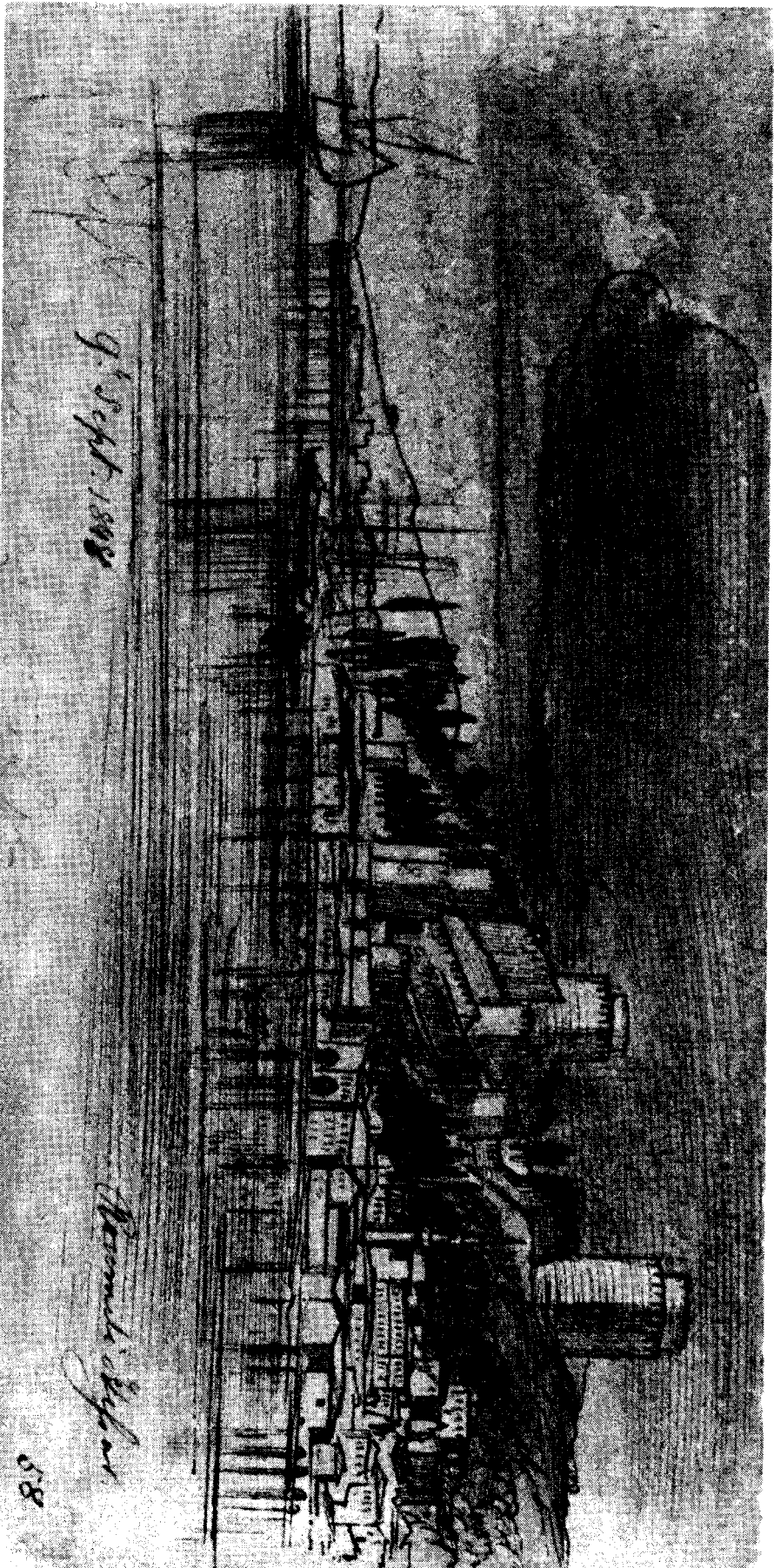


Plate 4 Rumeli Hisar on the Bosphoros by Edward Lear

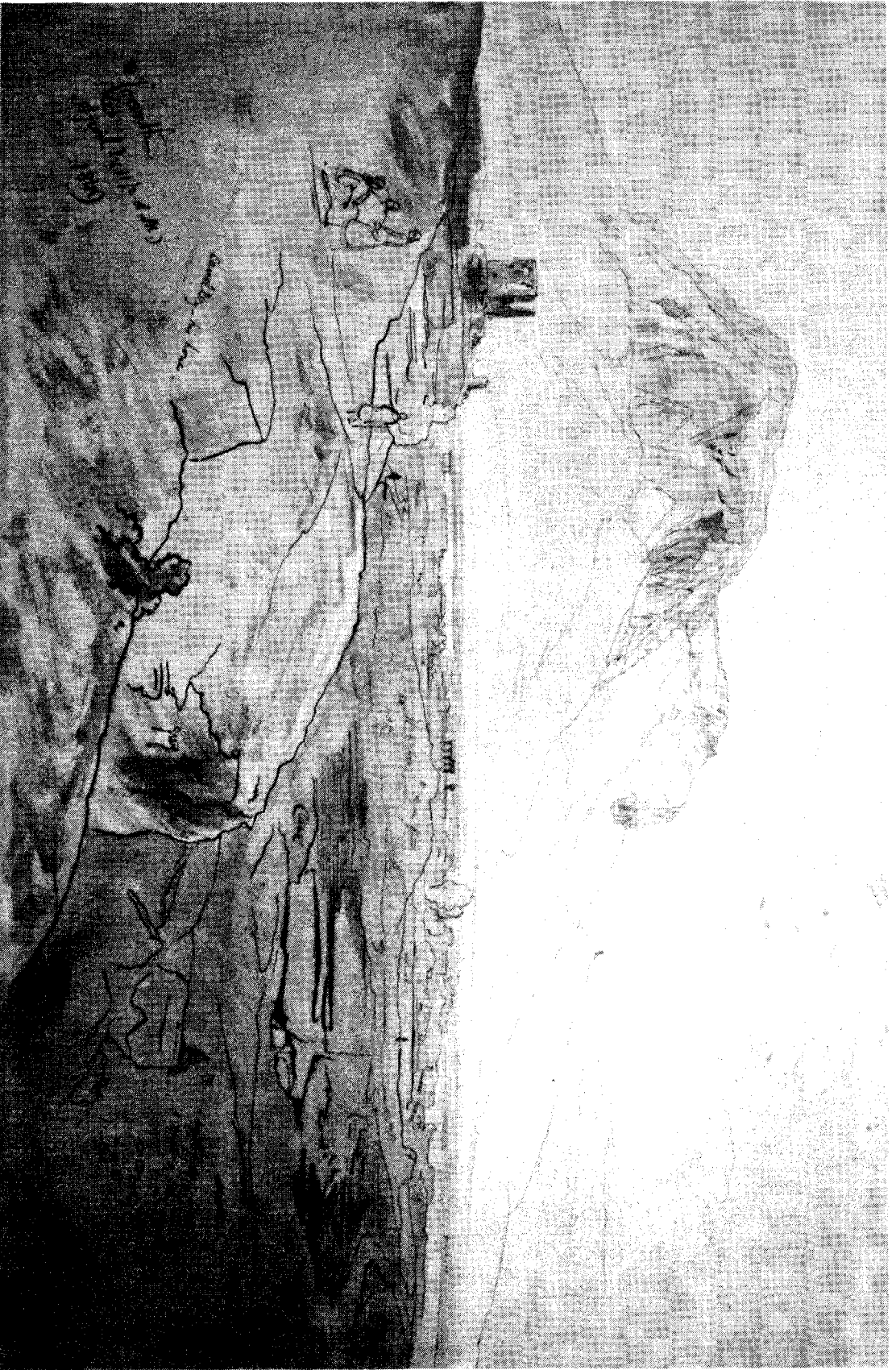


Plate 3 Corinth by Edward Lear



Plate 5 The Emperor John VIII Palaiologos



Plate 6 Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos



Plate 7 The Sultan Mehmed II



Plate 8 Gold seal of Constantine XI



Plate 9 Silver coin of Constantine XI



Plate 11 The sleeping emperor



Plate 12 Dedication to the future Emperor of Constantinople, 1838



Plate 13 Constantine I with his mother Helena and Constantine XI with his mother Helena



Plate 14 Constantine XI and Death

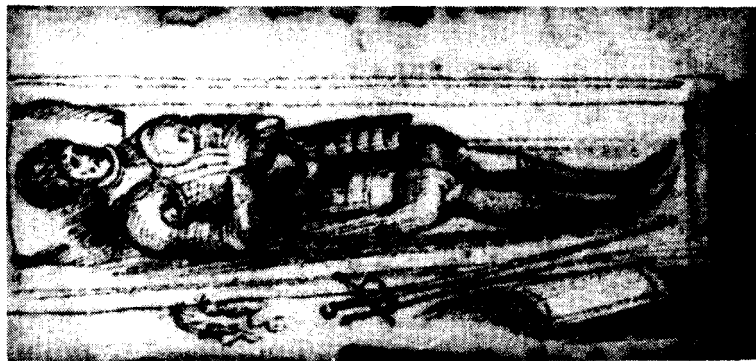


Plate 15 Constantine XI in his tomb

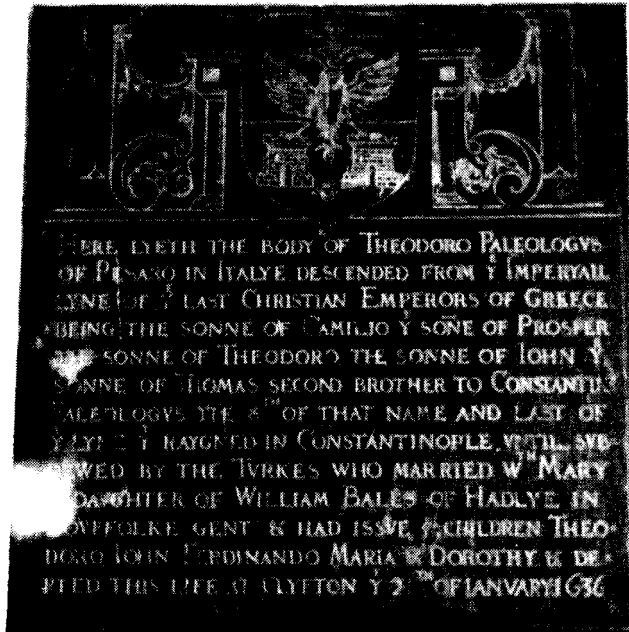


Plate 16 Monumental brass of Theodore Paleologus in Landulph, Cornwall



Plate 17 Gravestone of Ferdinand Paleologus, Barbados

His letter is in German and reports that 'our Emperor' (Constantine) with some others managed to get away by boat.²⁸ An Armenian poet called Abraham of Ankara wrote a Lament on the fall of Constantinople in which he says that the Emperor and the nobles of his court escaped by sea.²⁹ Finally, Nicola della Tuccia, in his *Chronicle of Viterbo*, gives a highly inaccurate account of events in which he records that the Emperor escaped in a small boat with eighteen companions.³⁰

These versions may be discounted. All other sources agree that Constantine died at his post. One western account, however, accuses him of cowardice and desertion. It is curious that the charge seems to have originated with Aeneas Sylvius, the later Pope Pius II who, in his earlier reports of the Emperor's death, made no such accusation. The source of his information is not known, but once again he may have got it from the Serbians. In his *Cosmographia*, which he composed in 1456–7, Aeneas Sylvius writes that in the confusion following the withdrawal of Giustiniani, 'the Emperor did not fight as befitted a king but took to his heels and fell in the throng in the narrow gateway and died trampled underfoot. When his corpse was found the head was severed, stuck on a spear and taken round the city and the camp to be mocked by all.'³¹ This slur on the Emperor was picked up by Christopher Richerius, or Richer, in his *History of the Turks* which he dedicated to François I^{er} of France in 1540. He charges Constantine with shameful dereliction of his imperial duty by running away, though he met his death in the crush of cowards doing the same. Richerius's account, translated from Latin into

²⁸ Samile, ed. Pertusi, *Caduta*, I, p. 231 (Italian translation).

²⁹ Abraham of Ankara, ed. Pertusi, *Caduta*, II, p. 414 (Italian translation); ed. M. B. Krikorian and W. Seibt, *Die Eroberung Konstantinopels im Jahre 1453 aus Armenischer Sicht* (Byzantinische Geschichtsschreiber, XIII; Graz–Vienna–Cologne, 1981) (German translation).

³⁰ Nicola della Tuccia, *Cronaca di Viterbo*, ed. Pertusi–Carile, *Testi*, p. 97.

³¹ Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, *Cosmographia. Historia de Europa*, VII (in *Opera quae extant omnia* [Basle, 1571]), pp. 400–2. It seems first to have been printed as *Pii II pontificis maximi de captione urbis Constantinopolitanae tractatulus* (n.d., Rome: Steph. Planck, c. 1470): 'Imperator non ut regem decuit pugnando sed fugiens: in ipsius porte angustiis cum cecidisset oppressus: calcatusque obiit.' Ed. with slight variations by P. A. Déthier, *Monumenta Hungariae Historica*, XXI, 1 (Pera, 1875), pp. 678, 682. The report of Aeneas Sylvius was translated into Italian, without acknowledgement, by Andrea Cambini: *Commentario di Andrea Cambini fiorentino della origine de Turchi et imperio della casa Ottomana*, published in Venice in 1538.

Italian, was incorporated into his *Universal History* of the Turks by Francesco Sansovino in 1654.³²

If Aeneas Sylvius heard this tale from the Serbians, it may be surmised that it originated among the Turks with whom they had been fighting. It bears a similarity to the accounts given by Tursun Beg and Ibn Kemal, that Constantine and his suite abandoned the fight and fled towards the sea or to the Castle of the Seven Towers and the Golden Gate, where the Emperor was killed and decapitated. Only one other source identifies this part of the city as the site of Constantine's death. It is the Russian version attributed to Nestor Iskinder and it is so fanciful in some other respects that one cannot be sure of its reliability on this point.³³ The Greek tradition, however, is fairly consistent in naming the Gate of St Romanos as the place where the Emperor was killed. Of the minor Greek sources, forty-two of the so-called Short Chronicles record the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Only five of them report the death of the Emperor and only one that he was decapitated.³⁴ One chronicler notes that he was not Emperor at all but only Despot, since he had never been crowned.³⁵ The other three are very alike in their versions, to the effect that Constantine was killed with all his officers at the breach in the wall by the Gate of St Romanos and won for himself a crown of martyrdom, scorning the options that were open to him of surrender to the infidel or escape.³⁶ None of the Short Chronicles mentions the Golden Gate as the site of Constantine's death.

The last Byzantine historians, on whose testimony most later accounts have been based, understandably give no hint that the Emperor might have lost heart and deserted his post at the walls. But they are not unanimous about the facts or the site of his heroic

³² *Christophorus Richerius ad Franciscum Gallorum Regem Christianiss. Libri quinque, De Rebus Turcorum* (Paris, 1540), pp. 96–7; Francesco Sansovino, *Historia Universale dell'Origine, Guerre, et Imperio de Turchi* (Venice, 1654), pp. 270–1. An English translation of Sansovino's version is presented by J. R. Melville Jones, *Siege of Constantinople 1453*, p. 122 (and p. x) under the name of 'Cristoforo Riccherio' as though it were a contemporary account. Christophore Richer, chamberlain to François I^{er}, was French ambassador to Stockholm and then to Copenhagen. On his plagiarism of Aeneas Syvlius, see B. Unbegaun, 'Les relations vieux-russes de la prise de Constantinople', *Revue des études slaves*, 9 (1929), 32–3.

³³ See below, pp. 87–8.

³⁴ Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, I. 69/5, p. 529.

³⁵ Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, I. 69/39, p. 535.

³⁶ Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, I. 14/107, p. 155; 34/21, pp. 271–2; 51, IV/17, p. 369 (= Pertusi–Carile, *Testi*, nos. II, IV, V, pp. 31–2, 34–6, 38).

death or martyrdom. Doukas, writing after 1462, gives the following account, some of which is not to be found in other sources:

The Emperor in despair stood, sword and shield in hand, and cried out: 'Is there no Christian here to take my head from me?' For he was abandoned and on his own. Then one of the Turks struck him in the face and wounded him. He in turn struck back. But another gave him a mortal blow from behind and he fell to the ground. They left him for dead as a common soldier, for they did not know that he was the Emperor. Later the Sultan asked Loukas Notaras, who had survived, what had happened to the Emperor and he said that he did not know, because he himself had been at the Imperial Gate when the Turks encountered the Emperor at the Gate of Charisios. Two young men from the army then came forward and one of them said to the Sultan: 'My lord, I killed him. In my haste to go plundering with my colleagues I left him for dead.' The other said, 'I was the first to strike him.' The Sultan then sent both of them with orders to bring him the Emperor's head. They rushed off to find it, cut it off and brought it to the Sultan, who turned to the Grand Duke and said: 'Tell me the truth. Is this the head of your Emperor?' He looked at it closely and replied: 'It is his. It is the head of my Emperor.' Others examined it and identified it. Then they fixed it on the column of the Augustaion and it hung there until evening. Later its skin was peeled off and stuffed with straw and [the Sultan] sent it around as a trophy and a symbol of his triumph to the ruler of the Persians and the Arabs and to the other Turks.³⁷

Kritoboulos of Imbros, who dedicated his History to the Sultan Mehmed, none the less admired the Emperor's courage.

The Emperor Constantine [he writes] died fighting gallantly with all who were around him in the crush at the Gate of Justin [Kerkoporta?] ... When he saw that all was lost, he is said to have exclaimed his last words: 'The city is taken and there is no reason for me to live any longer.' So saying, he hurled himself into the midst of his enemies and was cut down. He was a fine man and guardian of the common good, but unfortunate all his life and most unfortunate at its close.³⁸

Laonikos Chalkokondyles, who had been in Constantine's service since 1449 and finished his History some time after 1480, gives this account:

After Giustiniani had been wounded and withdrew, the Emperor said to [Demetrios] Cantacuzene and those around him: 'Let us attack these

³⁷ Doukas, pp. 361, 377. The Charisios Gate was slightly to the north of that of St Romanos. R. Janin, *Constantine byzantine*, 2nd edn, p. 281 (Edirne kapi).

³⁸ Kritoboulos, ed. Reinsch, pp. 70-1, 81-2.

barbarians.' Cantacuzene was killed; Constantine, driven back and forced to retire, was wounded in the shoulder and died... One of the janissaries later brought the Emperor's head to the Sultan and was rewarded... But as to the manner of his death none could tell, though it happened by the gate [of St Romanos] together with many of his men. He died like any commoner, having reigned for three years and three months.³⁹

Makarios Melissenos, compiler of the extended version of the memoirs of George Sphrantzes, writing in the sixteenth century, relates that Constantine inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy before he was killed somewhere near the Gate of St Romanos:

As soon as the city was captured, the Sultan's first concern was to discover whether the Emperor was alive or dead. Some came and reported that he had escaped, some that he had gone into hiding, and others that he had died fighting. Wanting to be certain of the truth, the Sultan ordered that the heaps of Christian and Muslim corpses be searched. They washed the heads of many of them but the Emperor could not be identified. By chance, however, his corpse was found. It was recognised by the imperial eagles engraved, as was the custom with an Emperor's armour, on its greaves and boots. The Sultan was delighted and commanded some Christians to bury the body with due honour.⁴⁰

This is the only account to report that Constantine was given Christian burial.

Other sixteenth-century chroniclers add more in the way of fantasy than of fact. The anonymous author of the so-called *Ekthesis Chronike*, composed in the middle of the century, presents the following relatively sober account:

Some Turks fell upon the Emperor in the district of St Romanos. He not wanting to be enslaved by them, fought back. They cut off his head and the heads of his company, not realising that he was the Emperor. Later there was a great hunt for his body, for the Sultan feared that he might still be alive and might get away to bring back with him an army from the Franks. But his head was found and identified by Mamalis and the other archons and the Sultan's mind was set at rest.⁴¹

³⁹ Chalkokondyles, II, pp. 159, 163. Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 98, gives a slightly more accurate figure for the length of Constantine's reign as 'four years, four months and twenty-four days', and his age as 'forty-nine years, three months and twenty days'. On the manner and place of his death, however, he gives no information, remarking only that his blessed lord and Emperor was killed and that he was not with him at the time.

⁴⁰ Phrantzes, *Chron. maius*, pp. 428–30, 432.

⁴¹ *Anonimo russo, On the capture of Cargrad (Constantinople)*, ed. Pertusi, *Caduta*, II, p. 406 (Italian translation). *Εκθεσις Χρονική, ed. Sp. P. Lambros, *Ecthesis Chronica and Chronicon Athenarum* (London, 1902), p. 16. See G. T. Zoras, Αἱ τελευταῖαι στιγμαὶ

The metrical chronicle of Hierax, the Grand Logothete, written about 1580, invents an obviously fictitious tale of the tragic demise of Constantine's wife and children. Hierax alleges that, in his hour of despair, the Emperor confessed his sins together with his wife and family and then had them all executed before his eyes so that they would not be captured, before riding off with his companions to meet his own death. He was chopped in half. The Greek *Chronicle of the Turkish Sultans*, which is otherwise based on the accounts of Chalkokondyles, Leonardo of Chios, Sansovino and the sixteenth-century Pseudo-Dorotheos, picked up this story. It was also recorded by the patriarchal notary Theodosios Zygomalas in a letter to Martin Crusius, the erudite professor of Tübingen, though neither gentleman could discover the name of the Empress. This is not surprising since Constantine had no wife at the time of his death and had never had any children.⁴²

One of the longest and strangest accounts is the Old Slavonic report on the fall of Constantinople, which exists in two versions. One of them is attributed to a certain Nestor Iskinder who appears to have kept a diary at the time. There are also Russian, Rumanian and Bulgarian redactions. Nestor tells of a single combat between Constantine and a Turkish general, the Beglerbey of the East, in which the Emperor had the upper hand. He goes on to describe how Constantine fought bravely at the breach in the wall during the last Turkish assault and how the janissaries, like wild beasts, hunted everywhere for him to take his head. Before he died, however, the Emperor went to the Great Church and threw himself on the ground to beg God's mercy and the remission of his sins; and when he had taken his leave of the Patriarch, all the clergy and the Empress, he went forth crying: 'Whoever wishes to die for the church of God and the Orthodox faith, come with me.' Mounting his Arab steed he made straight for the Golden Gate, slaughtering many Turks along his way. But he was not able to get

τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ Παλαιολόγου καὶ Μωάμεθ τοῦ κατακτητοῦ, in Zoras, *Περὶ τὴν ἄλωσιν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως* (Athens, 1959), pp. 132-3. On Mamalis (? Laskaris), see *PLP*, VII, no. 16554.

⁴² Hierax, *Threnos*, ed. C. N. Sathas, *Μεσαιωνικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη*, I (Venice, 1872), p. 266; ed. Déthier, *Mon. Hung. Hist.*, XXI, 1, p. 387; XXI, 2, p. 418. *Χρονικὸν τῶν Τούρκων Σουλτάνων*, ed. G. T. Zoras (Athens, 1958), p. 81; Elizabeth A. Zachariadou, *Τὸ Χρονικὸ τῶν Τούρκων Σουλτάνων ... καὶ τὸ Ἰταλικὸ τοῦ πρότυπο* (Thessaloniki, 1960), pp. 62-3. Martinus Crusius, *Turco-Graeciae libri octo ...* (Basle, 1584), Lib. I, p. 96. See G. Kournoutos, *Λόγιοι τῆς Τουρκοκρατίας*, I (Βασικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη: Athens, 1956), p. 178.

through the Gate because of the piles of corpses. There he was cut down and killed.

The Empress at once took the veil; and the officers and nobles who survived escorted her and her many ladies to the ships of Giustiniani and then to their families in the islands and the Morea... Mehmed instituted a search for the Emperor and the Empress... After he had visited the Great Church and forbidden any further destruction therein, he went to the imperial palace, and there a Serbian brought to him the Emperor's head. The Sultan made some of the Greek officers and nobles identify it under oath and he then sent the head to the Patriarch for him to encase it in gold and silver and preserve it; and the Patriarch put it in a gilded case and placed it under the altar of the Great Church. Others, however, have been heard to say that some of the survivors of those who had been with him at the Golden Gate that same night stole the Emperor's head and took it to Galata to be kept there. The Sultan searched in vain for the Empress until he was told that the Grand Duke, the Grand Domestic and others had put her on a boat. He had them all tortured and killed. Thus were the prophecies fulfilled...⁴³

Apart from the obvious inconsistencies in this account, as to whether Constantine died at the Gate of St Romanos or at the Golden Gate, there are several fabrications. There was no Patriarch of Constantinople at the time to receive and honour the Emperor's head or give him his blessing; there was no Empress, wife of Constantine, to be rescued by boat; and the Great Church of St Sophia, beneath whose altar the imperial relic is alleged to have been buried, was closed to Christians immediately after the conquest. The Diary of Nestor Iskinder may originally have been a straightforward record of events. But it accumulated fictitious and legendary accretions with the passage of the years.

The abundance of conflicting testimony makes it impossible to be certain about the place and the manner of Constantine's death. The Greek tradition maintained that he was killed as a hero, or a martyr, fighting at or near the Gate of St Romanos; while the Turkish and Slav traditions set the scene by the Golden Gate, whether or not he met his death as he was trying to run away. Naturally no Greek historian would take kindly to the suggestion

⁴³ Nestor Iskinder, *Report on Constantinople*, ed. Pertusi, *Caduta*, I, pp. 292-8 (Italian translation). Cf B. Unbegaun, 'Les relations vieux-russes', 13-38; Dujčev, *Medioevo bizantino-slavo*, III, pp. 412-52; U. M. Braun and A. M. Schneider, *Bericht über die Eroberung Konstantinopels nach der Nikon-Chronik übersetzt und erläutert* (Leipzig, 1943). The Rumanian version is translated into French by V. Grecu, 'La Chute de Constantinople dans la littérature populaire roumaine', *BS*, 14 (1953), 55-81.

that the last Byzantine Emperor met his death while trying to escape. On the other hand, the honour and glory of the Turks were not enhanced by the admission that the Emperor had been killed and decapitated without being recognised; that his regalia had been lost or stolen; and that his head was never brought to the Sultan, as Tursun Beg and Ibn Kemal imply. The Greek tradition is reinforced by the fact that the authors of the earliest contemporary accounts, Leonardo of Chios and Nicolò Barbaro, were inclined to belittle the bravery of the Greeks. On the whole it is perhaps best to accept one or other version of what the last Byzantine historians have to say about Constantine's death. It is certainly kinder to the memory of one who was without doubt a courageous man of action, 'a prince worthy of immortality', as Sagundino called him.⁴⁴ He died, as a later lament over Constantinople puts it, 'having enjoyed none of the fruits of his high office, save that of being known as the Emperor who perished in the general destruction of the Empire of the Romans'.⁴⁵

A most charming legend of Constantine's death is contained in another of the many laments for the fall of the city. It tells how the wretched Emperor Constantine, when the Turks broke in at the Gate of St Romanos, was guarding the walls with some of his nobles.

On his right was a church of the Virgin. He saw a Queen coming towards it with a number of eunuchs. They went in and the Emperor and his nobles hurried to see who this Queen might be and went into the church. [They saw her] opening the sanctuary gate and going inside. She sat on the bishop's throne and looked very mournful. Then she opened her holy mouth and addressed the Emperor: 'This unhappy city was dedicated to me and many a time have I saved it from divine wrath. Now too I have entreated My Son and My God. But, alas, he has decreed that this time you should be consigned to the hands of your enemies because the sins of your people have inflamed the anger of God. So leave your imperial crown here for me to look after until such time as God will permit another to come and take it.' When the Emperor heard this he became very sad. He took his crown and the sceptre which was in his hand and laid them on the altar; and he stood in tears and said: 'My Lady, since for my sins I have been bereft of my imperial majesty, I resign also my soul into your hands along with my crown.' The Lady of the Angels replied: 'May the Lord God rest your soul in peace in the company

⁴⁴ 'Princeps immortalitate dignus': Sagundino, ed. Pertusi, *Caduta*, II, p. 136.

⁴⁵ *Anonymi Monodia*, ed. Lambros, Μονωδία καὶ θρήνοι ἐπὶ τῇ ἀλώσει τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, *NE*, 5 (1908), 245.

of His Saints.' The Emperor made obeisance and went to kiss her knee; and she vanished and her eunuchs, who were her Angels, vanished with her. But neither the crown nor the sceptre were found where they had been left; for the Lady, the Mother of God, took them with her to keep until such time as there would be mercy for the wretched race of Christians. This was reported later by some who had been there and witnessed the miracle. The Emperor with his nobles then went forth stripped of his majesty to look on the enemy from the walls. They joined forces and gave battle to some Turks whom they encountered and were defeated. The Turks cut them down; and they took the head of the pitiful Emperor to the Sultan who had great joy of it.⁴⁶

This legend provided a divine and comforting explanation of the reason why Constantine's crown and sceptre were never found. The fact that he never had an imperial crown to lose is immaterial in the world of legend. Others say that he threw away his regalia to be lost in the press of battle so that he would not be identified as the Emperor, either alive or dead. The Lady of the Angels, however, left him with his sword; and some strange tales are told about it. In the nineteenth century an Italian ambassador in Constantinople called Tecco amassed a private collection of arms and weaponry which in due course he presented to the Armeria Regia or Royal Armoury in his native city of Turin. Among the items was a sword engraved with Christian figures and symbols and bearing a dedication in Greek to an Emperor Constantine. In 1857 the French scholar Victor Langlois examined it and published descriptions of it in three different journals. He pronounced that it was beyond question the sword of the last Byzantine Emperor. He claimed that it had come from the tomb of the Sultan Mehmed II.

The mystery deepens when one learns that Alexander Paspatis, the first modern Greek historian of the fall of Constantinople, believed that such a sword, bearing almost the same Greek inscription, had been presented to the Emperor Constantine by Cardinal Isidore in 1452. Unfortunately, Paspatis gives no reference for the source of this information. But he reports that the sword was preserved in Constantinople in his own day. His book was published in 1890. Langlois reported the sword as being in Turin in 1857. Perhaps the sword in Turin was a copy of that said to have been in Constantinople more than forty years later. Certainly, no

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 248–50; ed. Pertusi–Carile, *Testi*, pp. 326–31. The same tale is told in a Chronicle in the monastery of St John on Patmos. N. B. Tomadakis, 'H ἐν τῷ Πατμιακῷ Κώδικι 287 Μικρὰ Χρονογραφία, *EEBS*, 25 (1955), 28–37.

other expert in the field seems to have shared the confidence of M. Langlois in his identification of the Turin sword as that of Constantine Palaiologos.⁴⁷

In 1886 a delegation from the Greek community in Constantinople presented a ceremonial sword to Prince Constantine, heir to the throne of the Hellenes, on the occasion of his coming of age. The description of this sword, its decoration and the inscription on it suggest that it was a copy or a facsimile of that in Turin, though its donors may have alleged that it had once belonged to Constantine Palaiologos. An Athenian newspaper of the time, reporting its presentation to the prince, provides a rough line drawing of the sword with one half of its inscription and expresses the view that, while it appears to be of Byzantine style, there is no proof that it ever belonged to the last Emperor.⁴⁸ An entertaining story survived in the folklore of Constantinople about another sword of Constantine Palaiologos. During the siege of the city, God sent an angel to deliver a wooden sword to the Emperor. The angel's intermediary was a holy hermit called Agapios, who hurried to the palace to fulfil his divine mission. 'My lord', he said to the Emperor, 'here is a sword sent from God to exterminate your enemies the Turks.' When Constantine saw that it was made of wood he was angry and exclaimed: 'What am I going to do with a wooden sword when I already have the wonderful sword of the glorious David, father of Solomon, which is forty cubits long?' He chased the monk away, and he, in high dudgeon, went to present his sword to the Sultan Mehmed who gladly accepted it. It was thanks to this wooden sword that Mehmed succeeded in capturing

⁴⁷ V. Langlois, 'Notice sur le sabre de Constantin XIV, dernier empereur de Constantinople, conservé à l'Armeria Reale de Turin', *Revue archéologique*, 14, 1 (1857), 292-4 (translated into Greek in *Nea Pandora*, 8 (1858), 302-3 (with a line drawing of the sword)); Langlois, 'Mémoire sur le sabre de Constantin XIV Dracosès, dernier empereur grec de Constantinople', *Revue de l'Orient et de l'Algérie et des Colonies* (Paris, 1858), 153-65. A. G. Paspatis, *Πολιορκία καὶ ἄλωσις τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, ὑπὸ τῶν Ὀθωμανῶν ἐν ἔτει 1453* (Athens, 1890), pp. 94-5. His version of the inscription reads: Σὺ βασιλεῦ ἀήττητε λόγε Θεοῦ Παντάναξ,
Νίκης Βραβεῖα δώρησον κατὰ τῶν πολεμίων,
Τῷ ἡγεμόνι καὶ πιστῷ αὐθέντη Κωνσταντίνῳ,
Ὡσπερ ποτὲ τῷ βασιλεῖ μεγάλῳ Κωνσταντίνῳ.

The latest notice of the Turin sword seems to be by G. A. Sotiriou in the Greek journal *Κιβωτός* (May-June 1953), no. 17-18, p. 240, with a line drawing but no further information.

⁴⁸ Ἄστυ 2nd year, no. 64 (Athens, 7 December 1886), p. 2, and no. 65 (14 December 1886), pp. 6-8; *Deltion tis Estias*, no. 520 (14 December 1886), p. 3.

Constantinople. The monk Agapios was so upset by Constantine's impious scepticism that he became a Muslim.⁴⁹

Since there is so much uncertainty about the manner and the place of Constantine's death and the fate of his decapitated corpse, it might seem useless to hunt for the site of his grave. Theodore Spandounes or Spandugnino, in his lengthy treatise on *The Origins of the Turks*, completed in 1538, observes that: 'The Turkish historians say that Mehmed organised a search for the holy Emperor's corpse and, having found it, wept over it and honoured it and accompanied it to its tomb. The Christians, however, deny that it was ever found or recognised because nowhere in Constantinople is his grave to be seen.'⁵⁰ Makarios Melissenos, the pseudo-Phrantzes, is alone among the Greek historians in saying that Constantine was given a Christian burial. This is most improbable. The Sultan would surely not have allowed the tomb of the last Byzantine Emperor to become a shrine or place of pilgrimage, a reminder of past glories for the Christians in the city. The tale that his remains were buried in St Sophia as reported by Makarios Melissenos can also be dismissed as fantasy.⁵¹

Yet the myth persisted that Constantine's grave was somewhere to be found. The traveller Evliya Chelebi, writing about 1660, believed that the Christians had buried their Emperor in the monastery of Peribleptos, or, as the Turks called it, Sulu Monastir.⁵² Peribleptos remained in the hands of the Orthodox until 1643 and it certainly contained the tomb of an Emperor, though of a much earlier date than Constantine. In the nineteenth century a Turkish historian claimed that the last Emperor had been killed near Vefa Meidan where there was a spring of holy water. His body was buried in the monastery of the Zoodochos Pigi, the life-giving spring, in a wooded spot at Baloukli. While the Greek Patriarch of Constantinople, Constantios of Sinai, reported in 1844 that the mosque of Gül Camii, formerly the church of St Theodosia, whose feast is on 29 May, housed a Christian tomb

⁴⁹ H. Carnoy and J. Nicolaidis, *Folklore de Constantinople* (Paris, 1894), pp. 74–5.

⁵⁰ Spandounes (Theodoro Spandugnino), *De la origine deli Imperatori Ottomani...*, ed. C. N. Sathas, *Μνημεία... Documents inédits relatifs à l'histoire de la Grèce au moyen âge*, IX (Paris, 1890), p. 154.

⁵¹ Phrantzes, *Chron. maius*, p. 432.

⁵² Evliya Chelebi, translated by J. von Hammer, *Narrative of Travels in Europe, Asia, and Africa in the Seventeenth Century by Evliya Efendi* (London, 1846), p. 44. H. Turková, 'La Prise de Constantinople d'après le Seyahatname d'Evliya Celebi', *BS*, 30 (1969), 47–72, especially 61.

which many Turkish imams and Christian visitors believed to be that of the Emperor Constantine. These tales were no doubt encouraged if not invented by the local guides in the city, eager to make a quick profit out of gullible foreigners. Tourists in the nineteenth century were also told that the Turkish government provided oil for a lamp to burn over the Emperor's grave at Vefa Meidan. This story, for which there is no evidence but hearsay, was propagated by the proprietor of the nearby coffee shop. The tomb, of which there is now no trace, was probably that of a dervish, or of the Turkish soldier Arapis (or Azapis) who, according to Ottoman legend, was executed by the Sultan for having killed rather than captured the Emperor alive in 1453. Another legend told that it was the tomb of the giant Hasan, the first of the janissaries to scale the walls of the city. At all events, the alleged tomb near Vefa Meidan seems to have remained unhonoured and unknown until the nineteenth century. Yet another tradition was that Constantine was buried in the church of the Holy Apostles which had been the burial place of many of his imperial predecessors and served as the patriarchate of Constantinople for a few years after the conquest. His mortal remains were said to have been moved to the church of St Theodosia (Gül Camii) when the mosque of the Conqueror was built on the site of the Holy Apostles by the Greek architect Christodoulos.⁵³

It was the opinion of the learned Dr Paspatis in his history of the Turkish capture of Constantinople that Constantine's corpse was never found or identified and that the tale of its beheading was a myth invented by Isidore of Kiev. The Emperor must have been buried in a common grave along with his comrades-in-arms and his enemies; though the district in which he so nobly fell was still in 1890 unapproachable because of its foul smell.⁵⁴ It is idle to

⁵³ The various reports on Constantine's tomb and sword are collected by X. A. Siderides, *Κωνσταντίνου Παλαιολόγου, θάνατος, τάφος και σπάθη, 'Η Μελέτη* (January–December, 1908), 65–78, 129–46. See also N. G. Politis, *Paradoseis*, *Μελέται περί τοῦ βίου καὶ τῆς γλώσσης τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ λαοῦ. Παραδόσεις*. Βιβλιοθήκη Μαρασλή, 2 vols. (Athens, 1904), II, pp. 658–74; E. Pears, *The Destruction of the Greek Empire and the Story of the capture of Constantinople by the Turks* (London, 1903), pp. 354–5; H. J. Magoulias, *Doukas. Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks* (Detroit, 1975), pp. 314–15, note 289; F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans* (Oxford, 1929), I, pp. 40–1; II, p. 731. On the claim that the church of St Theodosia contained the Emperor's tomb, see A. Van Millingen, *Byzantine Churches in Constantinople* (London, 1912), pp. 173–8.

⁵⁴ Paspatis, *Poliorkia*, p. 192.

speculate further. Had the humiliated Christians of the fifteenth century known where their Emperor was buried, they would surely have passed the secret on to their descendants. Theodore Spandounes, who boasted descent from the family of Cantacuzene and who knew Constantinople well, spoke the truth. In the sixteenth century at least Constantine's grave was nowhere to be found. Even the popular Greek songs about the death of the noble and heroic Emperor Constantine gave no hint of where he was buried.

He died fighting all alone, mounted on his white-footed horse. He killed ten pashas and sixty janissaries before his lance was broken and his sword snapped and there was no one there to help him. He raised his eyes to heaven and cried: 'Lord Almighty, creator of the world, have pity on your people, have pity on Constantinople.' A Turk struck him on the head and the poor Constantine fell from his horse and lay stretched upon the ground in all the dust and blood. They severed his head and stuck it on the end of a lance; and they buried his corpse beneath the laurel tree.⁵⁵

The last word may be given to the Grand Logothete Hierax, writing some fifty years after Spandounes: 'The fatherland that he loved so dearly became the grave of the Emperor Constantine and all his nobles.'⁵⁶

⁵⁵ 'Ο Θάνατος τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου Δράγαζη, in E. Legrand, *Recueil de chansons populaires grecques* (Collection de monuments pour servir à l'étude de la langue néo-hellénique, n.s., I: Paris, 1874), no. 48, pp. 74-6.

⁵⁶ Hierax, ed. Sathas, *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη*, I, lines 685-6, p. 267; ed. Déthier, *Mon. Hung. Hist.*, XXI, 1, p. 388.

6 * THE IMMORTAL EMPEROR

Constantine had been married twice. His first wife Maddalena-Theodora Tocco had died in 1429. His second wife Caterina Gattilusio died in 1442. Neither had borne him any children. All the efforts of George Sphrantzes and others to find him a third wife had failed. He therefore died unmarried and without issue. The facts are confirmed by documentary evidence. In December 1494 his nephew Andrew Palaiologos, son of the Despot Thomas of the Morea, formally ceded his rights to the Byzantine throne to King Charles VIII of France. In the document which he drafted Andrew makes specific mention of the fact that his uncle Constantine had died childless and without an heir to his imperial title (*Constantini Palaeologi sui patruī sine liberis defuncti*).¹ The myth none the less persisted that Constantine left a widowed Empress and a son or daughters. It may have been propagated by the Slavonic versions of the Diary of Nestor Iskinder. Yet it had already been suggested in the letter that Aeneas Sylvius wrote to Pope Nicholas V in July 1453; and it was enshrined in the account of the capture of the city which the same Aeneas incorporated into his *Cosmographia*. He related how the Sultan Mehmed, at the drunken celebration of his triumph, had the wife of the Emperor Constantine, his daughters and the leading matrons of the court brought to his presence, defiled and then murdered.² Elsewhere Aeneas writes of Constantine's son escaping to Pera (Galata).³ A French chronicler, Matthieu de Coucy, who died in 1461, alleges that the Sultan ravished Constantine's widow in the church of St Sophia and then shut her up in his seraglio. Leo Allatius, however, denied that Constantine died as a married man and his accuracy in this respect was commended by DuCange some years later.⁴ The fate of

¹ Lambros, 'Ο Κωνσταντῖνος Παλαιολόγος ὡς σύζυγος...', *NE*, 4 (1907), 446.

² Ed. Déthier, *Mon. Hung. Hist.*, XXI, 1, p. 681. Lambros, *NE*, 4, 446, wrongly attributed this statement to Isidore of Kiev.

³ See above, p. 78.

⁴ Lambros, *NE*, 4, 447. Leo Allatius, *De ecclesiae occidentalis atque orientalis perpetua consensione* (Coloniae Agrippinae, 1648), cols. 955-6; C. DuFresne DuCange, *Historia*

Constantine's fictitious wife and children is told in its most dramatic and tragic form by the Grand Logothete Hierax; and from him, as already mentioned, it passed into the Greek Chronicle of the Sultans and to the erudite Professor Martin Crusius of Tübingen.

It passed also into modern Greek folklore. One story, told as late as 1900, was that the alleged Empress was six months pregnant by Constantine when he was killed. A male child was born to her while the Sultan was away on his campaigns in the north. The Empress had the boy christened and called him Panagi. When the Sultan returned he asked her what name she had given to the boy and she said Khan. She brought him up on her own since the Sultan was so often away. She found wise teachers and holy priests to instruct him in Greek letters and the Christian faith. He went regularly to church when he was young, but when he grew up he took to attending the mosque and became better versed in the Koran than in the Gospel. In due course he became Sultan and then he turned all his malice against our religion. None the less, the Sultans who succeeded him were of Christian stock.⁵ Another legend told that when the Turks captured Constantinople, the widow of the Emperor who had been killed shut herself in her palace. Mehmed tried to break down the doors but failed. In the end he had to agree to three concessions which she demanded. There should be a street in the city reserved for the use of Hellenes alone; the corpses of dead Christians should be carried to their funerals with their faces visible and not covered over according to Turkish custom; all coins minted by the Sultans should bear the name of Constantine or of Constantinople.⁶

Some modern scholars have stated that Constantine was betrothed if not married to Anna Palaiologina, daughter of the Grand Duke Loukas Notaras, who was foully murdered by the Sultan after the conquest. The statement has little authority. Anna herself never claimed that she had been the betrothed of the Emperor. She certainly never married and is known to have been living in Italy before 1453.⁷ Lastly, some Turkish chroniclers

Byzantina duplici commentario illustrata, I: *Familiae Byzantinae* (Paris, 1680), p. 245. Allatius (Allacci) of Chios (1586–1669) was librarian at the Vatican.

⁵ Politis, *Paradoseis*, I, pp. 26–7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 689–90.

⁷ Lambros, *NE*, 4, 454–66. S. Runciman, 'The Marriages of the Sons of the Emperor Manuel II', *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Slavi*, I (1980), 273–72, especially 281; Nicol, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos*, pp. 230–1.

invented a tale that the Emperor Constantine had been engaged to a daughter of the King of France. The king equipped a fleet of 600 ships worthy of his daughter's rank and sent them to plunder the coasts of Africa and Syria. Some of the booty that they collected was to form her dowry. Twenty of these ships carried the princess on to Constantinople. But the Turks, who were then besieging the city, apprehended them all and seized their booty. The princess from France became the wife not of the Christian Emperor Constantine but of the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed, by whom in due course she became the mother of the later Sultan Yildirim Bayezid.⁸

We are now in the realm of myth and legend, of fancy, of naive hopes and false prophecies. After that fateful Tuesday in May 1453 the first reactions of the shattered Christians were despair and shock. They expressed their feelings in laments and dirges for the fall of their city. Constantinople and the Great Church of the Holy Wisdom came to be personified as symbols of lost grandeur and glory and as objects to be addressed in rhetorical style as though their misfortunes were personal. One of the earliest exercises in this new literary form was the *Monodia* composed by John Eugenikos.⁹ He was not alone in attributing the disaster to the sins of the city's inhabitants and to the union of Florence which had sacrificed the purity of the Orthodox faith on the altar of expediency. He called on the name of Constantine the Great, the equal of the Apostles. But he ignored the last Emperor Constantine whom he had once admired. Andronikos Kallistos (c. 1400–80), a prominent scholar of the Byzantine diaspora in Italy, wrote a long and elaborate *Monodia*. He mourns the destruction of the city which had been 'the common hearth of all the Hellenes, the benevolent mother, nurse and haven of rest for all, the provider of every good thing'; and in the most exaggerated rhetorical language he laments the loss of the most holy Emperor Constantine, a ruler more perceptive than Themistocles, more fluent than Nestor, wiser than Cyrus, more just than Rhadamanthys and braver than Hercules.¹⁰

⁸ Evliya Chelebi, *Narrative of Travels*, pp. 38–9; Turková, 'La Prise de Constantinople', 50–5; Politis, *Paradoseis*, II, p. 690.

⁹ John Eugenikos, *Monodia*, ed. Lambros, *Μονωδίαι καὶ θρήνοι*, 109–269, especially 219–26. See Dujčev, *Medioevo bizantino-slavo*, III, pp. 408–12.

¹⁰ Andronikos Kallistos, *Monodia*, ed. Lambros, *Μονωδίαι καὶ θρήνοι*, 203–18; ed. Pertusi, *Caduta*, II, pp. 353–63 (in part).

The Laments dwelt on the past. Andronikos Kallistos could see no hope for the future. He pretended that he would rather die than go on living without the city and the empire. Gennadios Scholarios and others found some morbid consolation in the prophecy that the world would end at the close of the seventh millennium, for then there was not long to wait.¹¹ Nestor Iskinder thought that the foundation of Constantinople and its loss by Emperors with the name of Constantine was not just a remarkable coincidence. It was the accomplishment of the city's destiny. So had Old Rome been founded by Romulus and ended with Romulus Augustulus. It was all over. Byzantium had run its course.¹² Some, however, began to look ahead to a day when the humiliated Christians might again enjoy the past glories of Constantinople. Chalkokondyles expressed the hope that there would come a time when a Greek emperor would once more rule over a sizeable dominion inhabited by the remnants of his people.¹³ More credulous Greeks in the late fifteenth century and after made themselves believe that the last Emperor, Constantine Palaiologos, would come back to rescue them. He was not really dead. He was merely asleep and waiting a call from heaven. Men comforted themselves with the thought that many ancient prophecies about their city had been fulfilled, but there were many more yet to be realised.

A Lament of a different kind is the long poem on the *Capture of the City* wrongly attributed to the Rhodian poet Emmanuel Georgillas. It was composed in 1453 and is thus the first of the monodies on the subject which were to exercise the pens of many versifiers and prose writers in succeeding years and to pass into popular Greek folklore. The poet mourns the conquest and destruction of the holy city. But his main purpose is to spur the princes of western Christendom to liberate it from its slavery to the Turks. He calls on the pope, the Venetians, the Genoese, the King of France, the Duke of Burgundy and even the English to join forces in a crusade for the deliverance of Constantinople. His poem begins, however, with a lament for the bad luck which had always dogged the path of the last Emperor, Constantine Dragases,

¹¹ Scholarios, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Petit *et al.*, IV, pp. 511–12. See above, p. 75.

¹² See Dujčev, *Medioevo bizantino-slavo*, III, p. 423.

¹³ Chalkokondyles, I, p. 2.

right from the beginning of his career in the Morea. His first mistake was to destroy the castle of Clarentza with its churches and monasteries and the houses and property of its archons. Whoever advised him to do this was wrong; and it was from this crime that the rest of his ill fortune stemmed. When nominated as Despot of Mistra and the Morea, he built the great and wonderful wall of Hexamilion in the space of thirty days. But he achieved it at the cost of so much distress and suffering for the local landlords and their people that it caused nothing but misery; and when the Turks demolished it, it was the rich city of Corinth which paid the price and then the city of Patras, making disaster out of Constantine's success.

Then his misfortunes were compounded by the death of his brother Kalojoannes, the wise Emperor. The hour of his death was the hour of ruin for the Orthodox Christians. The foundations of Constantinople were shaken; and it was an evil day when Constantine was summoned from the Morea to be crowned Emperor in the unhappy city, for bad luck had always followed him. But they brought him to the palace and they crowned him Emperor in St Sophia; and on 29 May, a black day that should never have dawned, the Turkish dogs captured the city. It was an event to be lamented by all Christians of east and west and brought upon them by their own sins. Yet the Emperor was not to blame. It was not his fault. He and his people had pinned their hopes on help coming from the pope of Rome and his cardinals, from the King of France, from dukes, counts, princes and republics of the west, from the Emperor of Germany, the Serbs, the Russians, the Hungarians and others. The Emperor was expecting ships from Venice, Genoa, the Catalans and all of Italy. But his hopes were not realised; and he died, they say, falling on his own sword. The poet then goes on to describe the horrors of the Turkish sack and plunder of Constantinople and to exhort the rulers of the west, especially the pope, to come and liberate the unhappy city, warning them that if they delay and give the Turks time to consolidate their power in the east, the west too will soon be swallowed up. Towards the end of his poem he addresses the ill-starred Emperor Constantine Dragases: 'Tell me, where are you to be found? Are you alive, or did you die by your own sword? The conquering Sultan Mehmed searched among the severed heads and

corpses, but he never found you... There are those that say that you are hidden beneath the almighty right hand of the Lord. Would that you were really alive and not dead.'¹⁴

Another anonymous poem lamenting the fate of the city, written in or soon after 1453, is known as the *Anakalima* of Constantinople. Its author seems to have come from Cyprus, and he writes in a more demotic style. He gives a colourful and dramatic account of how the unfortunate Emperor Constantine died, begging his Cretan soldiers to cut off his head and carry it off to Crete rather than letting him be taken alive by the Sultan Mehmed and his ravening dogs. But the poet holds out no hope for the future of the once renowned city of Constantinople. It has become 'Tourkopolis'. The angel whose task it was to guard the church of the Holy Wisdom has gone; and the young man who, it was popularly believed, would have taken over the guard has come in another guise – the son, not of the founders of the church, but of the Antichrist, Mehmed; and the angels and the saints will help no more.¹⁵

The historian Doukas, in his account of the fall of the city, tells the following tale.

When the Turks broke in, the Christians rushed to the Great Church, monks and nuns, men and women carrying their babies and abandoning their homes. The street was packed with people making for the church. The reason for their stampede was this: there was an ancient and false prophecy that the city was destined to be violently captured by the Turks, who would slaughter the Christians as far as the column of Constantine the Great. At that point, however, an angel bearing a sword would come down and hand over the sword to an unknown man, a very plain and poor man, standing beside the column. The angel would say to him: 'Take this sword and avenge the Lord's people.' The Turks would then take flight, with the Christians chasing them and cutting them down as they fled; and the Christians would drive them from the city and from the east and west as far as the borders of Persia, to a place called Monodendrion. The people had long believed that they would be safe if they put the column of the Cross (or of Constantine) behind them.

Chalkokondyles, describing the same rush of refugees towards St

¹⁴ Pseudo-Georgillias, *Threnos*, ed. A. Ellissen, *Analekten*, III (Leipzig, 1857), pp. 106–249; W. Wagner, *Medieval Greek Texts* (London, 1876), pp. 141–70; E. Legrand, *Bibliothèque grecque vulgaire*, I (Paris, 1880), pp. 169–202.

¹⁵ Ἀνακάλημα τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης, ed. E. Kriaras (Thessaloniki, 1965).

Sophia, says that the prophecy foretold that the Turks would be stopped in their tracks in the district of Tauros, the Forum of the Ox or of Theodosios.¹⁶

In later Greek folklore the story was that the Turks would be driven east as far as a place called Red Apple Tree (Kokkini Milia) or Monodendrion, which was thought to be their original home or the birthplace of Muhammad. The legend of 'the poor man' who would one day be entrusted with the rescue of the Christian people and their city, crushing the 'Saracens' and taming the 'fair-haired races', derives from an amalgam of oracles and prophecies. The so-called Visions or Revelations of the Prophet Daniel seemed to foretell that 'the poor emperor', by name Ptocholeon, would destroy the Ismaelites and pursue them as far as Monodendrion. Other versions had it that 'the emperor who had been supposed dead' would emerge from a city called Tyrannis or Tyrannos and would defeat the Ismaelites in a great battle, in which 'the fair-haired races' would fight alongside him as his allies.¹⁷

The Byzantines who crowded into the cathedral of St Sophia behind the column of Constantine on 29 May 1453 were cruelly deceived in their naive faith that 'the poor emperor' standing by the column would save them. Prophecies, however, often remain open to reinterpretation. Later generations came to believe that their city would be restored and revived by an Emperor who was dead and entirely forgotten. He would awaken from his long sleep and take up again the sceptre of his Empire. This tale, of which there were many variations, was recorded in verse and was based on the so-called Oracles of Leo the Wise.¹⁸ In some of its versions the legendary 'poor man' has been upstaged by a greater figure. The Emperor to be resurrected was Constantine Palaiologos, the hero of the last days of Christian Constantinople who had been

¹⁶ Doukas, pp. 363–5; Chalkokondyles, II, p. 161. The column of Constantine was also known as the column of the Cross after the twelfth century when the statue of the Emperor was replaced by a cross. R. Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, 2nd edn (Paris, 1964), pp. 77–80.

¹⁷ These legends are collected in Politis, *Paradoseis*, II, pp. 658–74. The prophecies of Daniel are in A. Vassiliev, *Anecdota graeco-byzantina*, I (Moscow, 1893), pp. 33–47. See especially Pertusi, 'Les "Visiones Danielis"', in *Fine di Bisanzio*, pp. 35–127. On the origins of the prophetic texts, see P. J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley–Los Angeles–London, 1985). On the Turkish version of the prophecy about the Red Apple, see Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, II, pp. 736–40.

¹⁸ See C. Mango, 'The Legend of Leo the Wise', *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta*, 6 (Belgrade, 1960), 59–93.

turned into marble and thus immortalised. An angel of the Lord had rescued him when he was about to be killed by the Turks. The angel had swept him up, turned him into marble and concealed him in a subterranean cave near the Golden Gate of the city. There the marble emperor sleeps and awaits the angel's call to wake up. The Turks, continues the legend, know all about this miracle, but they cannot find the cave. So they have walled up the Golden Gate through which the Emperor will one day come to liberate the city. But when God so wills the angel will come down, reanimate the marble Emperor and give him back the sword which he had in battle; and he will come to life, march into the city and chase the Turks as far as Red Apple Tree.

The full cycle of the resurrection, enthronement and triumphs of the sleeping Emperor is illustrated in seventeen miniatures in the Chronicle of the Cretan painter George Klontzas which dates from 1590. The Emperor is shown guarded by angels as he lies in his tomb before being awakened, then being crowned in St Sophia and entering the palace in Constantinople. He then fights a series of six battles against the Turks. He is next seen praying at Caesarea in Cappadocia, marching on Palestine, returning in triumph to Constantinople and finally entering Jerusalem. There he is seen to deliver the Cross and his crown to the church of the Resurrection before handing back his soul to God at Golgotha and being buried in the same church at Jerusalem. Until the hour came for his own resurrection, however, the marble or sleeping emperor lay hidden beside the Golden Gate of Constantinople, the gate through which emperors in the past had come back in triumph from their battles. The fact that the Turks had walled it up added weight to the prophecy, for it showed that they were afraid that there might be some truth in it. Turkish tradition had, after all, set the scene of Constantine's death at the Golden Gate.¹⁹

In 1625 Sir Thomas Roe, then British ambassador to the Porte, sought permission to remove some of the antique statuary and carved stones from above the Golden Gate to send them to the

¹⁹ Klontzas, ed. Paliouras (see above, p. 73 note 37), plates 324-31, pp. 246-7. Politis, *Paradoseis*, I, p. 22, no. 33; II, pp. 688-74. N. A. Bees, *Περὶ τοῦ ἱστορημένου χρησιμολογίου τῆς κρατικῆς βιβλιοθήκης τοῦ Βερολίνου* (Codex Graecus fol. 62-297) καὶ τοῦ θρύλου τοῦ "Μαρμαρωμένου βασιλιᾶ", *BNJ*, 13 (1937), 203-44. N. G. Politis, 'Croyances populaires sur le rétablissement de la nation hellénique', *La Revue de Grèce*, 1:1 (1918), 151-70.

Duke of Buckingham for his collection of antiquities. He observed that the Golden Gate had been walled up and had never been opened since ‘the Greek Emperors’ lost the city. He failed to remove them not so much because of official interference as of local opposition. The Turks round about had a superstitious dread of the Golden Gate and all that went with it. Sir Thomas’s interpreter told him that there was a prophecy that the statues on it were enchanted and that if they were taken down ‘some great alteration should befall this city. He spake of a vault underground, that I understand not; ... and it is true that, though I could not gett the stones, yet I almost raised an insurrection in that part of the citty.’²⁰

In 1717, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, wife of the then British Ambassador in Constantinople, told a strange tale of Turkish superstition. It concerned a very fine Egyptian mummy which the King of France had wished to send as a present to the King of Sweden, Charles XII. ‘He gave a great Price for it’, she writes, ‘and the Turks (for it had to pass through Istanbul on its journey) took it into their heads that he must certainly have some considerable project depending upon’t. They fancy’d it the body of God knows who, and that the Fate of their Empire mystically depended on the Conservation of it. Some old prophecys were remembered upon this Occasion, and the Mummy committed prisoner to the 7 Towers, where it has remain’d under close Confinement ever since.’²¹ The traveller and later French consul Pouqueville had heard this story from a Turk and understood that the mummy had been intercepted and impounded by the janissaries at the Edirne Gate. They supposed it to be the relic of some saint and placed it under guard in the castle of the Seven Towers. Pouqueville was himself held prisoner there from 1799 to 1801 and he discovered where the mummy was hidden. He was never told that the Turks regarded it as a form of talisman for the protection of their city; and he had so little respect for its supernatural powers that he removed its head, slipped it in his pocket and carried it

²⁰ *The Negotiations of Sir Thomas Roe, in his Embassy to the Ottoman Porte from the Year 1621 to 1628 Inclusive* (London, 1740), pp. 387, 512.

²¹ R. Halsband, ed., *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, I (Oxford, 1965), pp. 364–5 (June 1717); F. W. Hasluck, ‘Constantinopolitana’, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 43 (1923), 162–7; Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, I, pp. 353–4.

away.²² None the less, Lady Wortley Montagu's story may have some substance, at least in so far as the Golden Gate in the Seven Towers was haunted by the mythical corpse of a saviour emperor who might one day come alive again and cause 'some great alteration' to befall the city.

The awakening of the sleeping emperor would, it was said, be heralded by the bellowing of an ox. There was, however, some difference of opinion about his name. The ninth-century Patriarch Tarasios is alleged to have foretold that the emperor who would be roused from his long sleep would have a name beginning with I and ending with S, signifying salvation, in other words Ioannes or John. Leo the Wise was credited with having drawn up a list of future Emperors and Patriarchs. That too went no further than an Emperor called John, presumably Constantine's brother and predecessor John VIII. Chalkokondyles, who was a great admirer of Leo's understanding of stars, spirits and their powers says that Leo did not list Constantine among the Emperors, because 'he was killed by barbarians and did not die in the imperial majesty'. Nor did he list the Patriarch Gregory III because Gregory resigned and went off to Italy.²³ The Patriarch Tarasios, from the dim shadows of the ninth century, seems to have foreseen what Leo the Wise recorded and what Chalkokondyles knew to be true, that John VIII was the last of the Byzantine Emperors to be properly crowned in Constantinople.

Other versions of the legend had it that the sleeping body at the Golden Gate in the castle of the Seven Towers was either John Palaiologos or St John the Evangelist who, in Orthodox tradition, was also the author of the Book of Revelation and so a unique authority. He was said to be an old man with a long white beard; and he held in his hand a book in which he recorded all the sins of the Turks as well as the Christians. Access to the Golden Gate was strictly forbidden. But those who got anywhere near the old man could hear him muttering: 'The time has not yet come. The hour has not sounded. The remission of sins has not occurred.' It was said that the Turkish guards lit a candle here every night and draped the body in a coverlet which they renewed once a year. They foretell that the day will come when Constantinople is

²² F. C. H. L. Pouqueville, *Travels in Greece and Turkey*, 2nd edn (London, 1820), pp. 256-7.

²³ Chalkokondyles, II, p. 169.

besieged and captured by seven nations who will fight among themselves for possession of the city. Rivers of blood will flow in the streets and it will be the worst disaster since the beginning of the world. Then the sleeping John, Evangelist or Emperor, will awaken from his long sleep and, standing in the midst of the city, he will shout to the seven nations: 'Stop! Enough blood has been shed.' The fighting will cease and John will reign in glory for three days and three nights before disappearing. Peace will then prevail in Byzantium.²⁴

A similar tale of folklore, known to the Turks as well as the Greeks, was that three holy men had, since 1453, been sleeping in the crypt of the mosque called Gül Camii, which had once been the church of St Theodosia or the Virgin of the Roses. They slept upright and if the visitor were a Christian he could hear them declaring in a solemn voice that the time and the hour had not yet come. The sins of the people had not yet been forgiven. The three holy men held registers in which they recorded every least peccadillo of the Christians. Yet another popular belief, at least by the eighteenth century, was that the 'sleeping emperor' lay in a coffin in St Sophia.²⁵ By then the whole corpus of Byzantine prophetic literature had passed into Russian. Nestor Iskinder had declared in the fifteenth century that nearly all the prophecies of Methodios of Patara and Leo the Wise about the fate of Constantinople had been fulfilled and that those that awaited their fulfilment would be proved right.²⁶ One theme especially dear to Russian exegetes of the prophets was that of the 'fair-haired nation' which would conquer the Ismaelites and take the City of the Seven Hills or Constantinople and its dominions, fighting as the allies of the long-lost Christian Emperor. In earlier times the blonde or fair-haired races of the prophecies had been identified as the Northmen or Normans and therefore the enemies of Byzantium. By the eighteenth century, however, they were thought to be the Russians and especially the Muscovites, willing and eager to fight for the restoration of an Orthodox Christian Empire centred on Constantinople.²⁷

²⁴ Carnoy and Nicolaidis, *Folklore de Constantinople*, pp. 79–80; Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, I, p. 354.

²⁵ Politis, *Paradoseis*, II, p. 673.

²⁶ Nestor Iskinder, ed. Pertusi, *Caduta*, I, pp. 296–9.

²⁷ On the 'fair-haired' or 'blonde races' in Greek, Latin and Slavonic prophetic literature, see Pertusi, *Fine di Bisanzio*, pp. 40–77; Mango, 'Legend of Leo the Wise', 85–6.

The liberation of the city by a blonde race of Russians seemed to be foretold if not confirmed by an enigmatic inscription from the tomb of Constantine the Great, first published in the seventeenth century. The interpretation of its meaning was ascribed to the Patriarch Gennadios Scholarios. It was odd that it had never been recorded before and had never been included in the compendious collection of the works of Gennadios. In fact the inscription as well as its interpretation seem to have been invented by the ingenious Pseudo-Dorotheos of Monemvasia, whose chronicle in demotic Greek was compiled in 1570 and first printed in Venice in 1631. It was an immediate success and went into numerous editions. There were also Slavonic, Rumanian and Russian versions. Byzantine prophetic literature thus played its part in nourishing the conceit that Moscow was the third Rome and that it was Holy Russia's sacred mission to drive the Turks out of Constantinople.²⁸

Pseudo-Dorotheos became a best-seller in Greek and other languages. Even more popular in the eighteenth century, however, was the book of visions and revelations that went under the name of Agathangelos. It was said to have been put together in Messina in 1279, published at Milan in 1555, and translated into Greek in 1751 by a Greek archimandrite from Adrianople. His name was Theoklitos Polyeides and it is clear that he was the only begetter of the text. As the Ottoman Empire began to decline and the Russian interest in Greece and in Constantinople grew, the *Visions of Agathangelos* seemed to point the way forward. Rigas Pheraios, author of the first constitution for a Republic of Greece still to be freed from the Turks, was no gullible peasant. But he had read his Agathangelos and he persuaded a publisher in Vienna to put it into print in 1790.²⁹ Even after the Greek War of Independence and the liberation of part of Greece in the 1820s, the market for oracles and their interpretation remained buoyant. One of the first books to be

²⁸ On Pseudo-Dorotheos, see D. B. Oikonomides, "Χρονογράφου" τοῦ Δωροθέου τὰ λαογραφικά, *Laographia*, 18 (1959), 113–243; 19 (1960), 3–95. B. Knös, *Histoire de la littérature néo-grecque* (Uppsala, 1962), pp. 408–9. The bogus inscription on Constantine's tomb was reprinted first by Matthaios Tzigalas of Cyprus in his Νέα Σύνοψις διαφόρων ιστοριῶν (Venice, 1637), and then by A. Banduri, *Imperium Orientale sive Antiquitates Constantinopolitanae* (Paris, 1711), I, lib. VII, p. 185.

²⁹ On Agathangelos and Polyeides, see Knös, *Histoire*, p. 461; A. Politis, 'Η προσγραφομένη στὸν Ρήγα πρώτη ἔκδοσις τοῦ Ἀγαθαγγέλου, *Laographia*, 7 (1969), 173–92; N. Politis, 'Croyances populaires', 165–8; D. Doikos, 'Ο Ἀγαθάγγελος ὡς προφητικὸν ἀποκαλυπτικὸν ἔργον καὶ τὸ μήνυμά τοῦ, Μνήμη 1821 (Thessaloniki, 1971), pp. 93–126.

printed in Athens, in 1838, was a collection of prophecies put together by one Petros Stephanitzes of Leukas. It contains, among other oracular effusions, the prognostications of Methodios of Patara; the spurious inscription from the tomb of Constantine the Great; the oracles of the Patriarch Tarasios and Leo the Wise; and the *Vision of Agathangelos*. The learned Dr Stephanitzes helped spread the word that the liberation from the Turks of the mainland and islands of Greece was only a beginning. He produced the evidence to show that the prophecies about the recovery of Constantinople were still to be fulfilled.³⁰ His pronouncements fuelled the dangerous notion held by politicians as well as more humble Greeks throughout the nineteenth century that the resurrection of the immortal emperor in Constantinople would herald the restoration of a Greek Empire centred on the city. Stephanitzes fed the flames of what was called the Megali Idea, the Great Idea. But he was no simple fool. He was an educated man and a qualified physician who helped care for Lord Byron in his last days at Missolonghi and was rewarded with Byron's sword.³¹

Later in the nineteenth century the myth of the sleeping emperor became a theme for contemporary Greek poets. George Bizyinos (1849–96) wrote a poem entitled 'The Last Palaiologos' which concludes with the tale of the emperor being woken by the angel and, repossessed of his sword, chasing the Turks all the way to Red Apple Tree.³² George Zalokostas (1805–58), in his poem 'The Sword and the Crown' first published in 1854, foretells the day when the crown of Constantine, taken away for safe keeping by the Lord of Heaven, will be restored to rest upon the head of a fair-haired emperor.³³ The myth was given new meaning when, for reasons best known to himself, the Danish King of the Hellenes, George I (1863–1913), had his son and heir baptised as Constantine. Readers of *Agathangelos* and Stephanitzes were enraptured. The monks of Mount Athos were at their most prophetic. Clearly the heir to the Greek throne was in the direct line of succession from the first and the last Emperors of

³⁰ P. D. Stephanitzes Leukadios, *Σύλλογος διαφόρων προρρήσεων* (Athens: A. Angelidou, 1838). He even includes a picture of the sleeping emperor with an angel holding his crown (p. 143).

³¹ On Stephanitzes, see D. A. Lignadis, in *Νέον Ἀθηναῖον*, 2 (1957), 55–70; Th. Fatouros, in *Ῥιζάριος Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Σχολή 1844–1969* (Πανηγυρικός Τόμος ἐπὶ τῇ 125 ἐτηρίδι αὐτῆς: Athens, 1969), pp. 187–202.

³² George Bizyinos, ed. I. M. Panagiotopoulos (Βασικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη: Athens, 1954), pp. 52–5. ³³ George Th. Zalokostas, *Τὰ ἅπαντα* (Athens, 1873), pp. 193–207.

Byzantium, Constantine I the Great and Constantine XI Palaiologos. We have seen how the Greeks in Constantinople presented the young Constantine with what they alleged was the sword of the last Christian ruler of their city. When he came to the throne of Greece in 1913 there were many of his subjects who hailed him as Constantine XII. His leadership in the Balkan Wars of 1912–13 and the eviction of the Turks from Thessaloniki fortified the fantasy that the Red Apple Tree would be his next stop. It was unfortunate that he fell foul of his prime minister Eleutherios Venizelos and had to abdicate before accomplishing what many believed to be his sacred mission.³⁴

The bubble of the Great Idea was finally pricked by the catastrophic failure of the Greek invasion of Asia Minor in 1922. In the same year Constantine of the Hellenes was forced to abdicate for a second time. The illusion of the sleeping emperor was laid to rest. But the myth itself lives on, as a harmless legend or a fairy tale. Perhaps its most poetic evocation in modern Greek literature is that by Kostis Palamas (1859–1943) in his long poem entitled ‘The King’s Flute’ first published in 1910:

King, I shall arise from my enmarbled sleep,
And from my mystic tomb I shall come forth
To open wide the bricked-up Golden Gate;
And, victor over the Caliphs and the Tsars,
Hunting them beyond Red Apple Tree,
I shall seek rest upon my ancient bounds.³⁵

The latest version of the legend comes in a popular song of the 1970s, called simply ‘The Marble Emperor’:

I sent two birds to the Red Apple tree, of which the legends speak.
One was killed, the other was hurt, and they never came back to
me.
Of the marble emperor there is no word, no talk.
But grandmothers sing about him to the children like a fairy tale.
I sent two birds, two house martins, to the Red Apple Tree.
But there they stayed and became a dream...³⁶

³⁴ See, e.g., G. B. Tzokopoulos, ‘Ο Βασιλεύς Κωνσταντίνος ΙΒ’, ed. E. Papapavlou (Athens, n.d.); E. Driault, *Constantin XII. Le Héro et Martyr Basileus* (Paris, 1936).

³⁵ *Kostas Palamas, The King’s Flute*, Greek text and English translation by T. P. Stefanides and G. C. Katsimbali (Athens, 1982), Canto XI, pp. 320–1. I have slightly modified the translation.

³⁶ Lyrics and music in P. Bien, J. Rassias, C. Yiannakou-Bien and C. Alexiou, *Demotic Greek*, II: ‘Ο Ίπτάμενος Θάλαμος (University Press of New England: Hanover and London, 1982), pp. 81–3.

7 * THE DYING EMBERS

The founder of the dynasty of Palaiologos, the Emperor Michael VIII, had died condemned as a heretic and a traitor by his church and people because he had bullied them into communion with the church of Rome. They had denied him the funeral pomps of an Orthodox Emperor. His descendant Constantine Palaiologos, whatever the true circumstances of his death, died as a hero in the eyes of the Orthodox church. Yet there is no evidence that he ever repudiated the union of Florence. He too died in communion with the church of Rome, a *catholicus zelator* as a German poet of the fifteenth century described him.¹ Many had accused him of heresy and betrayal of his faith while he was alive. His death sanctified him. The Patriarch Gennadios held his peace. He would surely never have countenanced the Emperor's canonisation; and there was no question of giving him a Christian burial. But his former subjects, the Orthodox Christians, honoured Constantine as a martyr. They forgot or ignored the fact that he had died in heresy; and, as the sleeping Emperor petrified in marble and waiting for his time to come, he became the invisible symbol of the still living faith of Orthodoxy. Stories were told of the priest who would one day return to complete the Liturgy in St Sophia which had been so savagely interrupted on the morning of 29 May 1453. He had disappeared into a wall of the church. He too was not dead but sleeping, waiting for his hour to come.²

The Turks were half afraid this might be true, just as they were afraid of the mysterious presence near the Golden Gate. There was said to be a locked door high up in a wall of St Sophia. The Sultan Mehmed ordered that it be forced open. But the skill and labours of all the locksmiths and masons in the city could not move it. For it was God's will that it should stay closed until such time as the city was once again Christian. Then the door would open by itself

¹ Anonimo Tedesco, *Carmen de desolacione civitatis Constantinopolitanae*, ed. Pertusi-Carile, *Testi*, p. 254.

² Politis, *Paradoseis*, I, p. 23; II, pp. 678-9.

and the priest would come out to continue his Liturgy. Another story had it that the door was made of gold and that once, at a time of financial necessity, the Turkish government decided to remove it and melt it down, replacing it with a bronze replica. An English technician was engaged for the task. But he was uneasy because, 'although an Englishman, he was a Christian'. He reported the matter to his ambassador in Constantinople, who prudently advised the Turkish authorities to leave the door alone. Fortunately for the Turks, his advice was heeded.³

A more real and immediate worry for the conquering Sultan Mehmed was that some claimant to the Byzantine throne might find a following and cause trouble. Constantine Palaiologos had no direct descendants. The Sultan made sure, however, that all other male members of his family were carefully watched or eliminated. There were also surviving members of the family of Cantacuzene, claiming descent from the Emperor John VI who had held the Byzantine throne in the middle of the fourteenth century. The Cantacuzenes were gradually rounded up and liquidated. In 1477 many of them who had been brought to Constantinople were slaughtered in a mass execution.⁴ Some of the imperial aristocracy, however, contrived to escape the clutches of the Turks in 1453. A passenger list survives of a Genoese ship that got away on 29 May with a full load of refugees. It bears the names of six members of the Palaiologos family, two Cantacuzenes, two Laskarids, two Komneni, two of the Notaras family and many of less distinguished birth. The ship's captain, Zorzi Doria, took some of them to Chios, others to Venetian Crete, from where they made their different ways to the Morea, to Corfu, or to Italy.⁵

Those who escaped to Italy and the west were beyond the Sultan's reach. There remained Constantine's brothers in the Morea. They were a nuisance to him but hardly a threat; and he allowed them to play at being Despots. They might have thought of making their Despotate a rallying-point for the creation of a Byzantine Empire in exile. But Demetrios and Thomas had never been able to cooperate; and they were more intent on fighting each other than on continuing the struggle against the Turks. In 1452,

³ Carnoy and Nicolaidis, *Folklore de Constantinople*, pp. 34-5; Politis, *Paradoseis*, II, p. 679.

⁴ Nicol, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos*, pp. 226-8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 194; A. E. Vacalopoulos, *Origins of the Greek Nation, 1204-1461* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1970), pp. 201-2.

when the siege of Constantinople had been about to begin, Constantine had sent an urgent message to the Morea for one of his brothers to come and help in the defence of the city. To prevent this the Sultan had sent his general Turahan to invade and devastate the Morea once again.⁶ As soon as the Turks had done their deadly work and gone, a revolt against Demetrios and Thomas broke out. It was prompted and led by the Albanian immigrants in the Morea, who encouraged the grievances of many of the local Greek landowners. They nominated one Manuel Cantacuzene as their leader. He was a son of that George Palaiologos Cantacuzene who had served Constantine in earlier days and whom Ciricao of Ancona had met at Kalavryta. The Albanians called him Ghin Cantacusino. The revolt had a limited success. The Sultan was not in favour of letting the Morea pass under Albanian control. The Despots Demetrios and Thomas, however feeble and contentious, were answerable to him. In December 1453 he sent another army to Greece to restore order. But not until October of the following year, when the elderly Turahan led his own troops to the scene, was the rebellion crushed. The brave Despots had invited the Turks to help them shore up their own authority. The 'pseudo-Despot' Manuel Cantacuzene was evicted. The Sultan demanded as his reward a substantial tribute in cash from Demetrios and Thomas.⁷

It seemed that nothing could prevent the slide into anarchy in the Morea; and nothing could bring Constantine's brothers to agree on their policy and pool their resources. Thomas retained a naive hope that the pope and the Christian rulers of the west might yet launch a crusade for the salvation of Greece. Demetrios, who had never hoped for anything from western Christendom, was more realistic in believing that it was better to placate his Turkish masters. Neither could find the money to pay the Sultan his tribute. In the end Mehmed lost patience with both of them. In May 1458 he brought his own army down from Adrianople. Athens had already succumbed to the Turks two years before. The Hexamilion wall was a heap of ruins. The only serious resistance to the Sultan's invasion came from Corinth, which lay in the jurisdiction of the

⁶ See above, chapter 4, p. 56.

⁷ Nicol, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos*, nos. 67, 83; Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror*, pp. 125-6.

Despot Demetrios. Mehmed left his gunners to besiege and bombard the Acrocorinth while he took the rest of his army south to conquer and destroy Thomas's portion of the Morea. They marched as far as Tripolis and then up to Patras which surrendered. From there they came back along the coast to Corinth, accepting or forcing the submission of every town along their way. The defenders of the Acrocorinth were at last persuaded to lay down their arms in August 1458.

The terms that the Sultan dictated reduced the Byzantine Despotate of the Morea, the last vestige of Constantine's Empire, to a fraction of its former extent. Corinth, Patras and the north west of the peninsula were now under direct Turkish rule. Umur, son of Turahan, was appointed as governor. Demetrios and Thomas were graciously allowed to keep Mistra and the rest of the Morea, on payment of their annual tribute to the Sultan, dividing their territory and their responsibilities between them as best they could. The Sultan must have suspected that the two brothers, who found it hard to live in peace before, would find it impossible when thrown together in a still more confined area. His suspicions were soon confirmed. They fell to quarrelling almost as soon as he had left. Thomas again implored the pope to send reinforcements. Demetrios invited the Sultan to support him against his brother. Neither had any real control over the people they were supposed to govern. The local lords were free to indulge in the feuding and anarchy which they had generally preferred.⁸

The Sultan may have been a little anxious that the new Pope Pius II, formerly Aeneas Sylvius, might respond to the call of the Despot Thomas and the constant exhortation of Cardinal Bessarion and organise a crusade for the rescue of the Morea. He had no doubt heard that the pope had convened a council at Mantua in 1459 and sent Bessarion with other legates to preach the crusade in Germany and elsewhere. There was little practical response. But the Sultan was certainly aware that the pope had hired a force of 300 soldiers to go to the aid of Thomas; that they had left Ancona and arrived in the Morea; and that they had just joined Thomas's troops in attacking Patras. The attack failed, though Thomas managed to recover Kalavryta from the Turks. It was scarcely a crusade. The mercenaries from Italy soon lost

⁸ Zakythinos, *Despotat*, I, pp. 265-60.

interest and began to drift home; and Thomas took to squabbling with Demetrios once again. The dreams of Pope Pius II and the high hopes of Bessarion for the liberation of the land that he knew so well were dissipated and forgotten in another round of fratricidal warfare between the brothers of the last Emperor Constantine. Towards the end of 1459 the Bishop of Lakedaimonia, acting on the Sultan's orders, brought them together and made them swear to keep the peace. Within weeks they were at war again.⁹

The Sultan's patience was exhausted. He had other and more pressing problems to face in the Balkans and in Asia Minor. But the time had come to bring order to the chaos in Greece, to end the pretence that the Morea was governed as a vassal state of the Ottoman dominions by the two surviving Despots of the Byzantine Empire. Conquest and annexation was the only solution. In April 1460 Mehmed assembled an army and led it himself first to Corinth and then past the ruins of Argos to Mistra. The Despot Demetrios surrendered without a struggle. He had already sent his family to the safety of the impregnable rock of Monemvasia. On 29 May 1460, seven years to the day since the fall of Constantinople, the city of Mistra passed into Turkish hands. It was as well that the Byzantine Sparta, the subject of so much rhetoric from Bessarion and his master Plethon, submitted so tamely. For otherwise it would have been reduced to the 'worthless soil' of Ovid's ancient Sparta and its churches, palaces, libraries and works of art might have been obliterated by the vengeful Turks. For it was the law of Islam that cities that resisted should be plundered and destroyed. Such had been the fate of Constantinople. Such also was the fate of the few places in the Morea that dared to fight back. Their men were massacred and their women and children were carried away. The Sultan's soldiers had orders to terrorise the population. Refugees flocked south to the Venetian harbours at Coron and Modon. The last known defender of the lost cause of the Despotate of the Morea was an otherwise obscure member of the Palaiologos family called Constantine Graitzas who held out at Salmenikon near Patras until July 1461.¹⁰

⁹ Zakythinos, *Despotat*, I, pp. 262–6.

¹⁰ Zakythinos, *Despotat*, I, pp. 266–74; Vacalopoulos, *Origins of the Greek Nation*, pp. 211–16; Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror*, pp. 175–7. On Constantine Graitzas, see *PLP*, IX, no. 21497.

By then the true Palaiologi, the brothers of the last Emperor Constantine, had abandoned their posts. The Despot Thomas and his family had fled to Modon and in July 1460 escaped from there to Corfu under Venetian protection. With them was the faithful George Sphrantzes, who died as a monk in Corfu about 1478. In November Thomas went on to Rome, ever hopeful of inciting a crusade for his restoration. He had with him, as a present for the pope, the head of the Apostle Andrew which he had brought from Patras. Pope Pius II, a romantic to the end, gave Thomas a warm welcome in Rome in March 1462. Bessarion handed over the apostolic relic and the scene of its presentation was later depicted on the pope's tomb in the church of Sant' Andrea della Valle. Thomas was rewarded with honours and pensions from the pope and his cardinals. He was still pleading his cause in Italy when he died in May 1465.¹¹ His brother Demetrios had no escape after the surrender of Mistra. He was a prisoner, albeit a favoured one. The Sultan treated him kindly and promised him an estate in Thrace. He was obliged, however, to recall his wife and daughter from their refuge in Monemvasia and to yield them to the Sultan's whim. For a while Demetrios lived in comfort at Adrianople drawing adequate revenue from the islands of Imbros and Lemnos, Samothrace and Thasos, parts of which had been allotted to him. But about 1467 he lost the Sultan's favour. He was stripped of his assets and sent in disgrace to Didymoteichon. He died as a monk in 1470; and with him died his line. His only daughter Helena was already dead and his wife Theodora outlived him only by a few weeks.¹²

The imperial house of Palaiologos was not yet extinct, however. Constantine's brother Thomas died in 1465. But Thomas's line was perpetuated in exile through three of the four children that his wife Caterina had borne him. Caterina had been a daughter of the

¹¹ On the last years of Thomas Palaiologos, see *PLP*, IX, no. 21470; Zakythinos, *Despotat*, I, pp. 287–90; Runciman, *Fall of Constantinople*, pp. 182–4; Setton, *Papacy and the Levant*, II, pp. 228–30. The celebrations of the presentation of the relic of St Andrew were described by Pope Pius II himself. *Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope. The Commentaries of Pius II*, translated by Florence A. Gragg, ed. by Leona Gabel (London, 1960), Book VIII, pp. 241–59. In September 1964 Pope Paul VI, in a gesture of ecumenical friendship, returned the head of St Andrew to the church of Patras.

¹² Zakythinos, *Despotat*, I, pp. 285–7; Runciman, *Fall of Constantinople*, pp. 181–2; *PLP*, IX, no. 21454.

Genoese prince Centurione Zaccaria and she died and was buried in Corfu in August 1462. The elder of her daughters, Helena Palaiologina, had married Lazar, the third son of the Despot George Branković of Serbia. She had left the Morea and settled at Smederevo, the great castle which her father-in-law had built on the Danube. Lazar was an unsavoury character. When he died in January 1458 he left Helena with three daughters to care for. In the following year the Sultan Mehmed captured Smederevo and put an end to the Despotate of Serbia. He allowed the widowed Helena to leave the country; and after some time at Ragusa she moved to Corfu to join her mother. She died on the island of Santa Mavra or Leukas in November 1473 having become a nun. But she had no sons to carry on the name of Palaiologos.¹³

The younger daughter of Thomas and Caterina was Zoe. When she was sixteen the pope, Sixtus IV, arranged for her to marry Ivan III, Grand Prince of Moscow, in the hope of converting the Russians to Roman Catholicism. The pope provided her dowry and solemnised her betrothal to Ivan in Rome in 1472. Her wedding, however, was celebrated in Moscow according to the Orthodox rite of her ancestors. The Russians called her Sophia; and this union between 'the new Constantine of Moscow', as Ivan liked to be known, and the niece of the last Byzantine Emperor, lent substance to the already growing fantasy that Moscow was the 'Third Rome'. She had four sons. They inherited through her the emblem of the double-headed eagle but not the name of Palaiologos that went with it. Ivan IV the Terrible was her grandson.¹⁴

The two surviving sons of the Despot Thomas were Andrew, born in 1453, and Manuel, born in 1455. They were brought up in Italy under the watchful eye of Cardinal Bessarion. He expected great things of them and composed improving tracts for them to commit to memory. Pope Pius II provided them with pensions after their father died in 1465, but his successor Sixtus IV was not so generous. Manuel left Rome about 1476 and threw himself on the mercy of the Sultan Mehmed who gave him an estate and an income. He married and had two sons, John who died young and

¹³ Nicol, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos*, no. 96; *PLP*, IX, no. 21364.

¹⁴ G. Vernadsky, *A History of Russia*, IV (New Haven and London, 1959), pp. 17-26; Setton, *Papacy and the Levant*, II, pp. 318-20.

Andrew who became a Muslim.¹⁵ Thomas's first born son, Andrew Palaiologos, being the eldest nephew of the last Emperor Constantine, was generally thought, not least by Bessarion, to be the lawful heir not only to the Byzantine throne but also to the Despotate of the Morea. The pope invested him with the rank and title of Despot and he adopted for himself the title of *imperator Constantinopolitanus*. He proved to be a disappointment. After Bessarion's death in 1472 he had no one to keep him in mind of his responsibilities. He married a woman of the streets of Rome called Catherine. The pope thereupon refused to support him for a while and twice he went to stay with his sister Zoe-Sophia in Moscow. Back in Rome after 1490, he persuaded the pope to help finance an expedition to reconquer the Morea from the Turks. The money was found and spent, but nothing came of the expedition. Andrew then sought the protection and support of King Charles VIII of France and, in 1494, when visiting his court, he ceded to Charles all his rights and title to the Byzantine throne. For himself he reserved only his title as Despot of the Morea. When Charles VIII died in 1498 Andrew was left without a patron and nearly penniless. In April 1502, just before his own death, he made a will in which he bequeathed all his titles to Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile. In June of the same year he died as a pauper. His widow had to beg the pope for money to pay for her husband's funeral. Some say that he died childless; others that he had a son called Constantine who was employed in 1508 as a commander of the papal guard. Russian documents ascribe to Andrew a daughter called Maria, unknown to western sources, for whom her aunt Zoe-Sophia arranged a marriage to Prince Vasili Mihailović of Vereia.¹⁶

The male line of the house of Palaiologos, the collateral descendants of the last Christian Emperor Constantine, was thus extinct by the beginning of the sixteenth century. This demonstrable fact has never deterred claimants to the Byzantine imperial title from appearing in various parts of Europe to the

¹⁵ On Manuel, see Zakythinis, *Despotat*, I, pp. 291–2. The identification of his son Andrew with the soldier Mesih Pasha, who took part in the abortive Turkish attack on Rhodes in 1480, is mistaken. The father of Mesih Pasha was Thomas Palaiologos Gidos. M. L. Bierbrier, 'Modern descendants of Byzantine Families', *Genealogists' Magazine*, 20:3 (1980), 93; *PLP*, IX, no. 21472.

¹⁶ On Andrew, see Zakythinis, *Despotat*, I, pp. 292–5; Runciman, *Fall of Constantinople*, pp. 183–4; Vernadsky, *History of Russia*, IV, pp. 122–30; *PLP*, IX, no. 21426.

present day. The family of Palaiologos was extensive even in Byzantine times; and not all who bore that name were related to the imperial line. The temptation among later Palaiologi, however, to discover or fabricate a link with the last Emperors of the Romans was often irresistible. A destitute refugee from the wreck of Byzantium could trade on the name of Palaiologos and acquire respectability if not a pension from a prince, a pope, or a cardinal. Many of them settled in the north of Italy, in Venice, in Pesaro, or Viterbo. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries there were numerous Palaiologi in the service of Venice as *stradioti* or light-armed cavalymen. Venetian documents frequently refer to their 'strenuous' prowess in the service of the Serenissima. Theodore Palaiologos, whose career is well documented and who died in 1532, probably came from Mistra. Others were John in the late fifteenth century, Annibale and his son Leziniano about 1586, and Andrew Palaiologos Graitzas about 1460, from whom some of the existing Palaiologi in Athens, still surprisingly numerous, claim descent.¹⁷ Early in the sixteenth century one Lucio or Livio Andronico Paleologo lived at S. Elpidio a Mare near Pesaro. Later in the same century the theologian Jacobus Palaeologus of Chios, who became a Dominican in Rome and travelled widely in Europe, boasted of his imperial ancestry and claimed to be a grandson of Andrew. His theology carried him into the deep waters of Lutheranism and he was burnt as a heretic on the order of Pope Gregory XIII in 1585. Among his children was a son called Theodore who is known to have been living in Prague in 1603. A contemporary of Jacobus was one Panaiotus or Panagiotes Palaeologus living in Vienna. When brought to trial there on a criminal charge he identified himself as a genuine Palaeologus and 'true Prince of Lacedaemonia'. He was none the less convicted as a swindler and a forger.¹⁸

The city of Viterbo was believed to have a special link with the family of Palaiologos. It was forged through the specious

¹⁷ C. N. Sathas, *Documents inédits relatifs à l'histoire de la Grèce*, VII-IX: *Documenta feudatorios Graecos, strathiotas dictos, illustrantia* (Paris, 1888-90). Marianna Kolybas, Θεόδωρος Παλαιολόγος, *Thesaurismata*, 10 (1973), 138-62. On Graitzas and the Palaiologi of Athens, see D. G. Kambouroglou, Μνημεία τῆς Ἱστορίας τῶν Ἀθηναίων, III (Athens, 1892), pp. 251-6. A. Th. Papadopulos, *Versuch einer Genealogie der Palaiologen* (Munich, 1938), nos. 180-2.

¹⁸ R. Dostálová-Jeništová, 'Jakob Palaeologus', *Byzantinische Beiträge*, ed. J. Irmscher (Berlin, 1964), 153-75; P. Mallat, 'Byzantinische "Kaiserenkel" in Wien', *Adler. Zeitschrift für Genealogie und Heraldik*, II (1982), 279-81.

etymological equation of the Latin *Vetus verbum* (= Viterbo) with the Greek *Palaios logos*, which was held to be one of several no less dubious proofs that the Palaiologos family had its roots in that city. This too lent some ancestral respectability to the otherwise obscure Palaiologi who found themselves washed up in the north of Italy in the later Middle Ages. A remarkable number of documents and inscriptions which had lain dormant and unnoticed for centuries providentially came to light in support of genealogical claims.¹⁹ There was, however, an older branch of the family in the north of Italy. It stemmed from the sons of the Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos and his second wife Yolande-Eirene of Montferrat. It was to spite her husband that Yolande invested her eldest son Theodore with the hereditary title of Marquis of Montferrat in 1306, and settled him in Lombardy with a Genoese wife. Their line became extinct in 1533 with the death of Giangiorgio who had no legitimate heir. But the name of Momferrato–Paleologo seems to have lingered on in the Greek island of Cephalonia until the seventeenth century. Those who held it, however, could claim no connection with the family of the last Byzantine Emperor.²⁰

The Palaiologi on the island of Syros, on the other hand, claimed to be descended from a son of Andronikos Palaiologos, Despot in Thessalonica, who died in Constantinople in 1429, and who has been credited with at least two children. Another branch of the family traced their lineage back to the Emperor Manuel II through his son Theodore, Despot of the Morea and brother of the last Emperor Constantine. Theodore is said to have had an otherwise unattested son called Emanuel Petrus. The existing Palaiologi in Malta and in France are sometimes said to be his descendants. One of them was the French diplomat and author Maurice Paléologue who died in 1944 and was very proud of his

¹⁹ Viterbo was reported to be the home of the Palaiologi by Martin Crusius, *Turcograecia*, Lib. III, p. 344, in 1584. See J.-F. Vannier, 'Les Premiers Paléologues. Etude généalogique et prosopographique', in J.-C. Cheynet and J.-F. Vannier, *Etudes prosopographiques* (Paris, 1986), pp. 123–87, especially 129–31; A. Guillou, 'Faux byzantins des archives italiennes', *Studi in onore di Riccardo Filangieri*, I (Naples, 1960), pp. 130–43.

²⁰ A. E. Laiou, 'A Byzantine Prince Latinized: Theodore Palaeologus, Marquis of Montferrat', *B*, 38 (1968), 386–410. *PLP*, IX, no. 21465. P. Mallat, 'Die Palaiologen nach 1453', *Akten XVI Internationaler Byzantinistenkongresses* (= *JÖB*, 32:6 (Vienna, 1982)), 9–18; M.-D. Sturdza, 'Paléologue de Montferrat', in *Dictionnaire historique et généalogique des grandes familles de Grèce d'Albanie et de Constantinople* (Paris, 1983), pp. 543–6.

imperial blood, although his ancestors were in fact Rumanian.²¹ The Rumanian branch of the family originated in the eighteenth century when the Turks entrusted the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia to princes of Greek extraction. They were chosen from the wealthy and influential Greek merchant community which had clustered around the Orthodox Patriarchate in Constantinople, in the district called the Phanar. They were known as the Phanariots and they included some who called themselves Palaiologi and boasted of their imperial ancestry. Some of them were connected with the Phanariots across the Danube in what is now Rumania. But no Palaiologos, it seems, attained the coveted and lucrative rank of hospodar or prince of Moldavia or Wallachia. In securing these positions they were outclassed by those Phanariots who, very dubiously, claimed descent from the imperial family of Cantacuzene, or from less blue-blooded Byzantine families such as Argyropoulos or Mavrocordato.²²

Another alleged descendant of Theodore, Despot of the Morea, was Johannes Antonius Angelus Flavius Comnenus Lascaris Palaeologus, who described himself as 'Princeps de genere Imperatorum Orientis'. He died in Vienna in 1738. The names of Angelus and Flavius he derived from his reputed ancestor, the Emperor Isaac II Angelus (Flavius), who was supposed to have revived and reconstituted the Imperial Constantinian Order of St George in 1191. The last Grand Master of the Order belonging to his family, however, is said to have been one Giovanni Andrea Angelo Flavio Comneno Lascaris Paleologo, Duke of Thessaly, Prince of Macedonia, Count of Drivasto, Durazzo etc. He had no issue and in 1697 assigned his office and his Order to the Duke of

²¹ On Andronikos Palaiologos and his alleged descendants, see *PLP*, IX, no. 21427; A. Sideras, 'Neue Quellen zu Andronikos Palaiologos', *BZ*, 80 (1987), 3-15; Mallat, 'Die Palaiologen', 12-13. C. A. Gauci and P. Mallat, *The Palaeologos Family. A Genealogical Review* (Malta, 1985), table 15. On Emanuel Petrus and his alleged descendants, see Mallat, 'Byzantinische "Kaiserenkel"', 282-4. Among them were the two branches of the family of De Vigo Aleramico Lascaris Paleologo who liked to trace their ancestry back to the Emperor Nero. Gauci and Mallat, *The Palaeologos Family*, tables 17 and 18. There were also Palaiologi who lived on in Greece and Turkey, some of whom, like Andrew, grandson of the Despot Thomas, became Muslims. See, e.g., N. Beldiceanu, 'Un Paléologue inconnu de la région de Serrès', *B*, 41 (1971), 5-17; Sturdza, *Dictionnaire*, p. 374.

²² N. Iorga, *Byzance après Byzance* (Bucharest, 1935); A. E. Vakalopoulos, 'Ιστορία του Νεοελληνισμού', II, 2nd edn (Thessaloniki, 1976), pp. 418-23; C. Mango, 'The Phanariots and the Byzantine Tradition', in R. Clogg, ed., *The Struggle for Greek Independence* (London, 1973), pp. 41-66.

Parma, Francesco I Farnese.²³ The Constantinian Order of St George was believed by its members to have been founded as the first of its kind by Constantine the Great in 312. Its history, conceived, born and nurtured entirely in the realm of fantasy, has given employment to countless forgers and title-seekers from the seventeenth century to the present day. The most industriously inventive of them in the nineteenth century was the wealthy Greek merchant Demetrios Rhodocanakis of Chios, who lived in London, became a British citizen and styled himself His Imperial Highness the Prince Rhodocanakis. He was tireless in the pursuit and fabrication of evidence to support his claim to the Byzantine throne and to his title of Grand Master of the Constantinian Order, publishing expensive and elaborate genealogical tables and a whole series of spurious documents to prove his point. Criticism and reasoned refutation of his claims only spurred him on to wilder feats of ingenuity. The bubble of his pretensions was finally pricked with a panoply of evidence by the French scholar Emile Legrand, but not before Rhodocanakis had procured recognition of his nobility from the British Foreign Office, the Vatican and several chanceries of Europe.²⁴

Another Byzantine Order of Chivalry was that said to have been founded in Ioannina in June 1290 by Nikephoros Doukas Komnenos Angelos, Despot of Epiros from 1267 to 1296. It was known as the Constantinian Angelican Order of the Holy Wisdom (St Sophia) under the rule of St Basil of Caesarea. It is worth mentioning only because it was alleged, on the basis of forged documents, that Constantine XI Palaiologos granted privileges to

²³ There are many seventeenth-century works devoted to the history and rites of the Constantinian Order. See, e.g., E. Legrand, *Bibliographie hellénique ou Description raisonnée des ouvrages publiés par des Grecs au dix-septième siècle*, V (Paris, 1903), nos. 34, 49, 50, 53, 54, 121, 133, 134, 152, 164, 234, 252. F. Schizzi, *Sulla Milizia Constantiniana Memoria Storica del Conte Folchino Schizzi* (Milan, 1828); Sturdza, *Dictionnaire*, p. 546; Mallat, 'Byzantinische "Kaiserrenkel"', 281-4; A. Pippidi, "'Fables, bagatelles et impertinences". Autour de certaines généalogies byzantines des XVI^e-XVIII^e siècles', *Etudes byzantines et post-byzantines*, 1 (Bucharest, 1979), 269-305.

²⁴ H.I.H. The Prince Rhodocanakis, *The Imperial Constantinian Order of St George. A Review of Modern Impostures and a Sketch of its True History* (London, 1870). Rhodocanakis, *Reply to a Criticism in The Saturday Review on the Imperial House of Rhodocanakis* (Westminster, 1870), 20 pp.; *Genealogia della Imperiale Casa Rhodocanakis di Scio* (Four Genealogical Tables: n.d.); *I Principi Rhodocanakis di Chio e l'Imperiale Ordine Constantiniano di S. Giorgio*, *Giornale Araldico-genealogico*, Anno IX. N. 12 (Pisa, 1882), 1-18. The case of Rhodocanakis was demolished with a wealth of documentation in 1895 by E. Legrand, *Dossier Rhodocanakis. Etude critique de bibliographie et d'histoire littéraire* (Paris, 1895), pp. 206.

its Grand Masters in 1452. One of them, who claimed to be the last lineal descendant of the Despots of Epiros, is said to have died at Palermo in 1860. The city of Ioannina has produced many historical oddities. An Order of Chivalry blessed by the last Emperor of Constantinople must surely be the most bizarre and least probable of them. To those who have set their hearts on believing in such institutions it is idle to point out that western-style Orders of Chivalry, and the heraldic devices that went with them, were unknown in the Byzantine world.²⁵

'Prince' Rhodocanakis either did not know or did not care that there had been an Irish claimant to his imperial throne a generation before him. In 1830 Nicholas Macdonald Sarsfield Cod'd of Duke Street in Wexford petitioned first Lord Aberdeen and then Lord Palmerston pressing his ancestral claim to the recently established Kingdom of Hellas or Greece, which had been offered to the young Leopold of Saxe-Coburg. Leopold had wisely declined it. Sarsfield described himself as 'the Comte de Sarsfield of the Order of Fidelity Heir and Representative to his Royal Ancestors Constantines [*sic*] last Reigning Emperors of Greece subdued in Constantinople by the Turks'. He enclosed an immense and closely written genealogical tree tracing his descent from Dermot King of Ireland on one side and from the Palaiologi on the other. His imagination was more cultivated than his literacy. Annoyed by the incivility of their Lordships in not acknowledging his petitions, the Comte de Sarsfield of Duke Street Wexford proposed to present his case to Charles X of France, to the Emperor of Russia, to the King of Prussia and to the pope. Perhaps he did. The letter which he addressed to King William IV survives in manuscript. But again he received no acknowledgement. The Irish claimant to the throne of the Constantines seems to have got no further than Wexford.²⁶

Rhodocanakis did, however, know of the English connection with the throne and title of Constantine Palaiologos and made full use of it to lend substance to his own genealogical fantasies. On a wall inside the parish church at Landulph near Plymouth in Cornwall there is a brass plaque recording the death of one

²⁵ See, e.g., Tommaso li Pira, *Breve istoria della Despotal Casa Angelo, o de Angelis, di Epiro* (Palermo, 1939).

²⁶ A. C. F. Beales, 'The Irish King of Greece', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 51 (1931), 101-5.

Theodore Paleologus in 1636. The text, which has been reproduced many times, reads as follows:

Here lyeth the body of Theodore Paleologvs
of Pesaro in Italye descended from ye imperyall
lyne of ye last Christian Emperors of Greece
being the sonne of Camilio ye sonne of Prosper
the sonne of Theodoro the sonne of John ye
sonne of Thomas second brother to Constantine
Paleologvs the 8th of that name and last of
yt lyne yt raygned in Constantinople untill sub
dewed by the Tvrkes, who married with Mary
ye daughter of William Balls of Hadlye in
Sovffolke gent: and had issue 5 children Theo
doro, John, Ferdinando, Maria and Dorothy, & de
parted this life at Clyfton ye 21th of Janvary 1636.

The Theodore Paleologus who died at Clifton in 1636 and was buried at Landulph thus believed that he was a direct descendant through four generations of Thomas Palaiologos, brother of the last Emperor Constantine. The line of descent seems quite plausible until one observes that there is no contemporary evidence to show that Constantine's brother ever had a son called John. Constantine's friend and chronicler of the family, George Sphrantzes, was meticulous about recording the names and dates of all its members. The two sons of Thomas whom he records were Manuel and Andrew. He names no others. The earliest and the only reputable authority to credit Thomas with a third son called John is Leo Allatius, writing in 1648.²⁷ The genealogical tree inscribed on the memorial to Theodore Paleologus in Cornwall and adorned with the double-headed eagle thus appears to be faulty at its first branch. It has been argued that the alleged John was an illegitimate son of Thomas or that his real name was Leone. Neither suggestion is convincing. The best that can be said is that Theodore was descended from one of the several Palaiologi known to have settled in Pesaro in northern Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and who later claimed affinity with the imperial house of Byzantium.²⁸

²⁷ Leo Allatius, *De ecclesiae occidentalis atque orientalis perpetua consensione*, col. 956: '... Andrea, Manuele et Ioanne Thomae Palaeologi Despotae filii...'.
²⁸ The inscription seems first to have been published by Vyvyan Jago (later Arundell), 'Some Observations on a Monumental Inscription in the Parish Church of Landulph, Cornwall', *Archaeologia, or Miscellaneous Tracts relating to Antiquities*, 18 (1817),

Theodore's own career and the fortunes of his family, however, are not without interest. Theodore was born about 1560 and was the nephew of two gentlemen of Pesaro, Leonidas and Scipione Paleologus. All three were convicted of attempted murder. Theodore was exiled from Italy and found his way to England, where he was employed as a hired assassin and a soldier in the service of the Earl of Lincoln. In 1600 he married, as his inscription relates, Mary, daughter of William Balls, of Hadleigh in Suffolk. The wedding took place at Cottingham in Yorkshire. His first child, Theodore, was born only ten weeks later, but he died in infancy in September 1601. He had three other sons and three daughters, for the inscription mentions only those that survived childhood. He is known to have fought as a soldier in the Netherlands between 1609 and 1621 and then to have lived in Plymouth before settling at Clifton mansion in Landulph, Cornwall. The register in Exeter Cathedral gives the date of Theodore's burial as 20 October 1636 and not, as in the inscription, 21 January. In 1795 his grave was accidentally opened revealing an oak coffin. When the lid was lifted the body was found to be in perfect condition; and it was possible to see that Theodore Paleologus had been a very tall man with a strong aquiline nose and a very long white beard.

His eldest daughter Dorothy married a Cornishman called William Arundel of Clifton on 1656. The entry in the marriage register states that she was of imperial stock ('Dorothea Paleologus de stirpe imperatorum'). As she was then fifty years old it is unlikely that she had any children. She and her husband were buried at Landulph in 1681 and 1684. Theodore's younger daughter Mary, who probably never married, died in 1674; and his third daughter died young. Of his three sons, John Theodore Paleologus was born in 1611 and is known to have been in Barbados in the West Indies thirty years later. Theodore junior, born in 1609, became a captain in the British army, died in 1644

83-96. See also J. T. Towson, 'A Visit to the Tomb of Theodore Palaeologus', *Transactions of the Historic Society* (Liverpool, 1857), 213-23. Most of what follows, however, is derived from the much fuller account of the inscription and of Theodore Palaeologus and his family given by Canon J. H. Adams, *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, n.s., 6:2 (Truro, 1970), 95-120. See also E. Legrand, 'Les Paléologues anglais', in *Dossier Rhodocanakis*, pp. 69-80; Gauci and Mallat, *The Palaeologos Family*, table 6.

and was buried in Westminster Abbey, not because of his imperial ancestry but because he fought on the side of Parliament against the Royalists in the Civil War. Finally, there was Ferdinand Paleologus, born about 1615. He too became a soldier, but he emigrated to Barbados before the Civil War began. He and his brother John seem to have gone there to join relatives of their mother, Mary Balls, who had already settled in Barbados. They were among the first settlers, for the island was not colonised until about 1620. Ferdinand acquired a small landed estate, married a lady called Rebecca Pomfrett and had one son named Theodorious. His will survives, dated September 1670. He died in October 1678 and was buried in Barbados. He was for long remembered there as 'the Greek prince from Cornwall'. When his grave was opened in 1844 it was found that Ferdinand had been buried with his feet pointing to the east, 'according to the Greek custom', and that like his father he was exceptionally tall. In 1906 a monument was erected in the churchyard of St John's church at Barbados bearing an inscription commemorating 'Ferdinando Paleologus, descended from ye imperial lyne of ye last Christian Emperors of Greece'. His son Theodorious or Theodore, named in Greek style after his grandfather, became a sailor, returned to England and died at Corunna in Spain in 1693. He married a Martha Bradbury of Barbados and had a son born in Stepney in London and perhaps also a daughter.

As late as the nineteenth century, after the War of Independence, the provisional government of liberated Greece sent a deputation to western Europe to see if any of the imperial line of the Palaiologi existed. They visited Italy and other places where Greek refugee families had been known to settle; and in due course they came to Landulph in Cornwall. But they found no living symbols of their lost empire.²⁹ There were, however, and perhaps still are, others in England who claimed affinity with the last Emperors of Constantinople. When King Othon was evicted from Greece in 1862, one Theodore Palaeologo, probably from Malta though then resident in England, pressed his hereditary claim to the throne of Greece. His name is inscribed on the headstone of his widow's grave in the Greek cemetery at West Norwood in south London: 'Theodore

²⁹ B. Burke, *Vicissitudes of Families, and Other Essays*, by Sir Bernard Burke, Ulster King of Arms, 2nd edn (London, 1859), pp. 198–201.

Attardo di Cristoforo de Bouillon, Prince Nicephorus Comnenus Palaeologus (hereditary claimant to the Grecian throne 1863)'. He died in 1912 at the age of eighty-nine. His widow was Laura, daughter of Nicholas Testaferrata Marchese di Noto of Malta; and she seems to have been related to another grand lady who lies buried at West Norwood, the Princess Eugenie Nicephorus Comnenus Palaeologus, who was born in 1849 and died in 1934. Her gravestone describes her as 'a descendant of the Grecian Emperors of Byzantium'. She married Col Edmund Hill Wickham, RA, who died in 1907, and had four sons, the eldest of whom, also buried at Norwood, died at the age of twenty in 1900 and is described as: 'Constantine Douglas Prince Palaeologus'. His three brothers all became officers in the British army and are collectively recorded on their memorial stone as 'Princes of the house of Palaeologus', though they seem to have preferred to call themselves 'Cristoforo de Bouillon Wickham'.³⁰

A less likely claimant to the Byzantine legacy was a postman called Archie White-Palaeologus who, in the 1970s, declared that he was of Greek origin and descended from the imperial family of Constantinople. His great-grandfather had gone back to Greece after 1821 to assert his hereditary rights to the throne, but no one would listen to him. Archie maintained that his real name was Prince Robert Wheeler Palaeologus; and he reported that there were still many Palaeologi living in England who from time to time dressed up in their imperial robes and held assemblies, at which they addressed each other as prince and princess.³¹

The embers of the fire and glory of the last Christian Emperor of Constantinople smoulder on. The latest to huff and puff upon them was another Englishman, Peter Francis Mills of Newport in the Isle of Wight, who died aged sixty-one in January 1988. For long he had called himself Prince Petros Palaeologos, though he liked to be styled as 'His Imperial Majesty Petros I, Despot and Autokrator of the Romans, The Prince Palaeologus'. His letter heads were imprinted with the title of Grand Master of the *Ordo*

³⁰ The supposed ancestry of the Maltese claimants through the families of Di Cristoforo, Attardo de Bouillon and Testaferrata is partially expounded by Gauci and Mallat, *The Palaeologos Family*, tables 19 and 21.

³¹ See B. Tsimpidaros, *Οἱ Ἕλληνες στὴν Ἀγγλία* (Athens, 1974), pp. 18–19. One William Thomas Palaeologus 'de stirpe imperatorum', born in 1828 and died on 5 July 1873, lies buried in the churchyard at Newton Valence near Selborne in Hampshire.

Imperialis Constantinianus Militaris Sancti Georgii. His seal displayed the double-headed eagle. His Imperial Chancellor or *Kouropalatiōs*, who was convinced of his own imperial ancestry, lived in Dunkineely, Co. Donegal in Ireland. The titles which Peter or Petros adopted were clearly his own invention. Sometimes he also called himself Duke of the Morea. His claim to be descended from the Palaeologi, however, merits a little more attention. For although his father was plain Mr Frank Mills of the Isle of Ely, his mother had been Miss Robina Colenutt, daughter of Samuel Colenutt, a plumber in Niton in the Isle of Wight. Petros always referred to her as Princess Robina Colenutt-Palaeologos and declared that it was through her that he came by his Byzantine titles. The belief that the house of Palaiologos was connected with the family of Kolonet, Colnet, Colnutt, or Colenutt was not new.³² Earlier genealogists had laboured to prove that one John Laskaris Palaiologos of Kolnet who died at Viterbo in 1558 had married Maria Colneat Phokas, a child of the marriage of Prince Matthew de Kolonet to a daughter of Uzun Hasan, Khan of the Turkomans of the White Sheep or Ak–Koyunlu and Lord of Dyarbakir in Persia. One of the sons of Maria Colneat and John Laskaris Palaiologos was said to have been Richard Komnenos Phokas Palaiologos of Kolonet who married Joanna Dauntsey, daughter of Sir John Dauntsey, a cousin of Henry VIII, at Southampton, settled at Combley in the Isle of Wight, and died there in 1551.³³

The reader's credulity has perhaps been stretched far enough in the vain search for the imperial antecedents of Prince Petros of the Isle of Wight. He liked to think, though he could never prove, that his mother was descended from William Colenutt, the son of that Richard Palaiologos of Kolonet, who was alleged to have settled at Combley. A sober and scholarly account of the Colenutts of the Isle of Wight was written in 1958 by Rear Admiral Noel Wright. Prince Petros, alias Peter Mills, countered with a pamphlet entitled

³² Gauci and Mallat, *The Palaeologos Family*, tables 6 and 10. The name Kolonet or Colnet is said to be derived from the Byzantine *theme* or province of Koloncia in Asia Minor.

³³ The facts or fictions related above derive mainly from private correspondence with the late 'Prince' Petros Palaeologos, with Dr F. S. Stych of Lucca, with Cesare Sabatucci Marquis Flavi of Rome, with Professor P. Mallat of Vienna, and with Mr G. Colenutt of Leeds. The Prince's fantasies were finally exploded by C. D. Webster, 'The Palaeologus Legend', *The Genealogists' Magazine*, 22:10 (June, 1988), 367–70. I am especially grateful to Professor A. A. M. Bryer for generously sharing with me the fruits of his own researches into the Palaiologan mysteries of the Isle of Wight.

‘the Imperial Palaeologi in England 1400–1965’, which he wrote under the pseudonym of Count A. A. Saddington. The latest word on the subject was published by C. D. Webster, the County Archivist of the Isle of Wight, who describes the Admiral’s study as ‘an honest piece of research’ and condemns the pseudo-Saddington’s riposte as ‘historical rubbish’. It seems that the self-styled Prince, Emperor, Despot and Duke was no more than an English eccentric. He was often to be seen striding the streets of Newport, ‘with long flowing white hair, sandals but no socks and some sort of order or military award around his neck’. He was evidently the victim of his own delusions. His first wife, the mother of his family, left him in 1975. His second wife, whom he married ten years later, piously and loyally continues to defend her assumed title of H.I.H. Patricia Palaeologina, Empress of the Romans. *Debrett’s Peerage* refused to have anything to do with him. Yet some were taken in. For when he died at Ventnor on 2 January 1988, *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph* and the *Isle of Wight County Press* all printed obituaries of His Imperial Highness Petros I Palaeologos. His son Nicholas at last felt free to tell the truth and to pour deserved ridicule on his father’s follies which had caused so much embarrassment to his family. He did so with some relish and not a little venom in the local newspaper and in *The Times*, denouncing the ‘Prince’s’ pretensions as ‘a complete and utter sham’ and expressing the hope that ‘the ghost of Prince Palaeologus’ might now be buried once and for all.³⁴

There may well be others who claim the heritage of the imperial Byzantine family of Palaiologos. None of them, however, can do more than try to prove the title through collateral descent. For the last Emperor Constantine died childless and unmarried. It was one of the several misfortunes that had dogged his unhappy life. His father Manuel II, when the Turks were at the gates of Constantinople in 1397, had uttered this prayer: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, let it not come to pass that the great multitude of Christian people should hear it said that it was in the days of the Emperor Manuel that the City, with all its sacred and venerable monuments

³⁴ *The Isle of Wight County Press*, 15 January 1988; *The Times*, 23 January 1988. A useful list of distinguished Greeks bearing the name of Palaiologos is provided in the Μεγάλη Ἑλληνική Ἐγκυκλοπαίδεια, XIX (Athens, 1932), pp. 416–29, and Supplement, IV (Athens, 1963), p. 93.

of the faith, was delivered to the infidel.³⁵ This was the ultimate misfortune of his son Constantine Palaiologos, the last Emperor of the Romans. He had prayed that he might be killed rather than live to see the consequences. He was fortunate only in that his last prayer was answered.

³⁵ Doukas, p. 85. Nicol, *Last Centuries of Byzantium*, p. 320.

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